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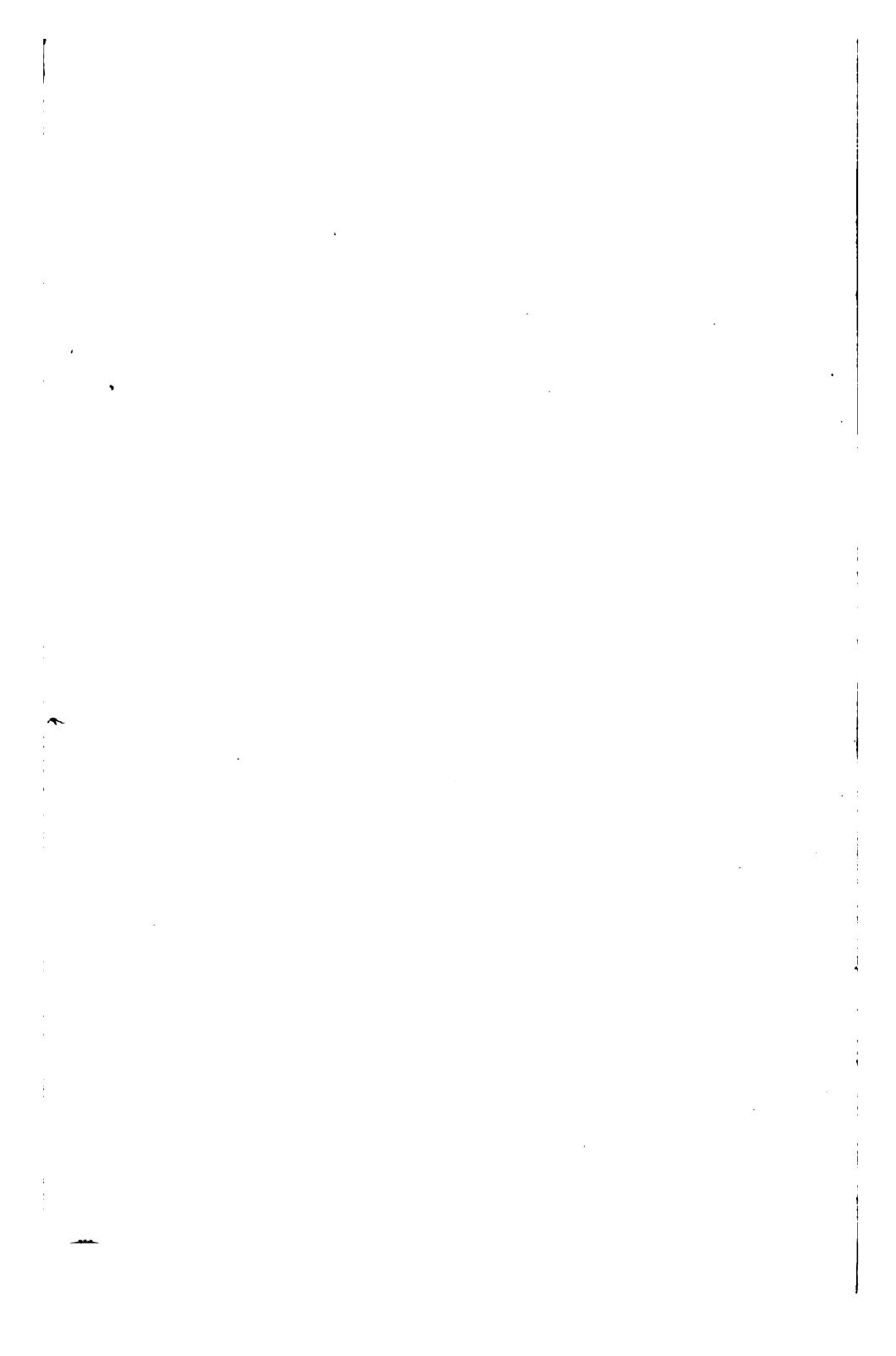


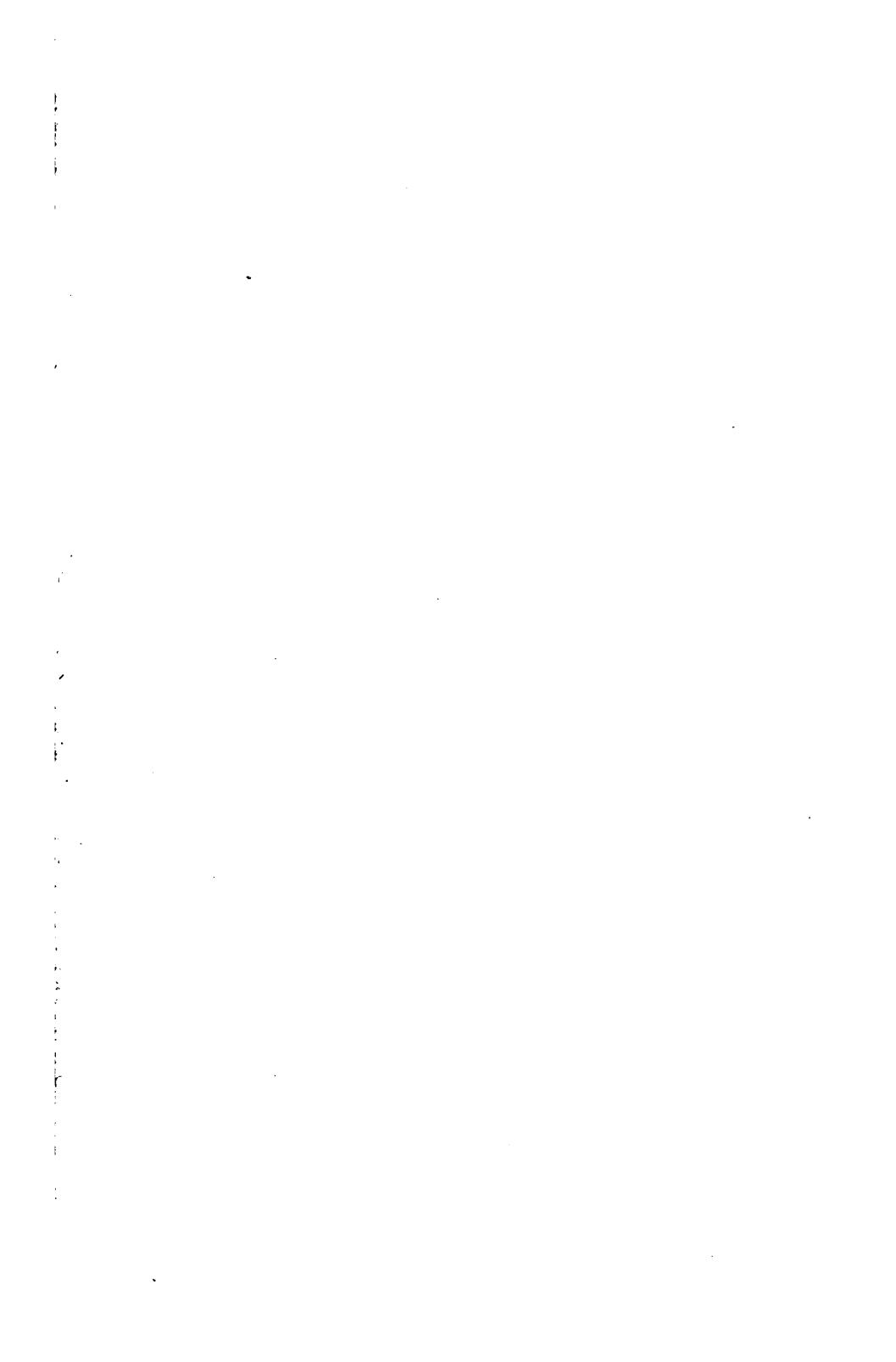
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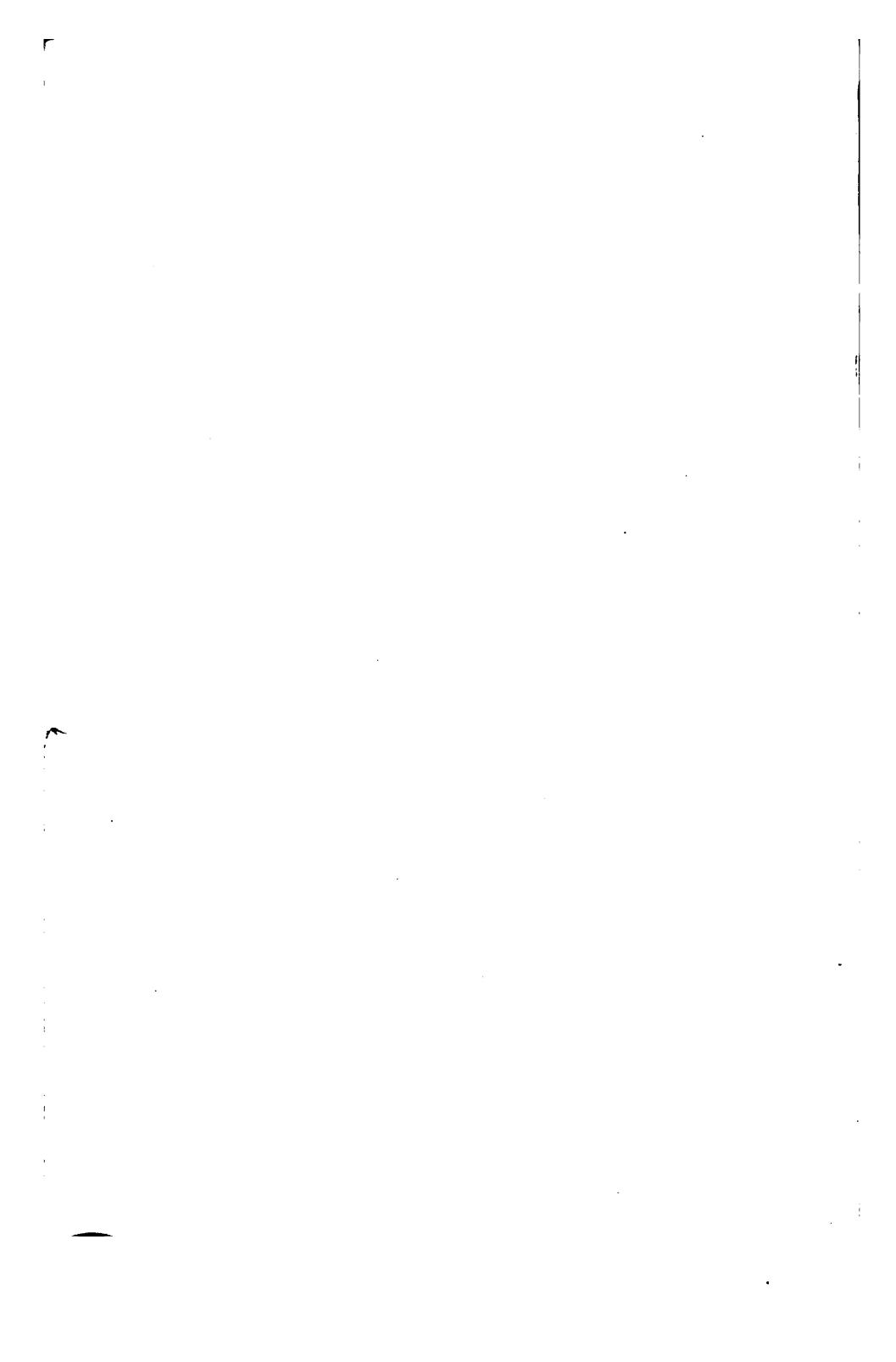
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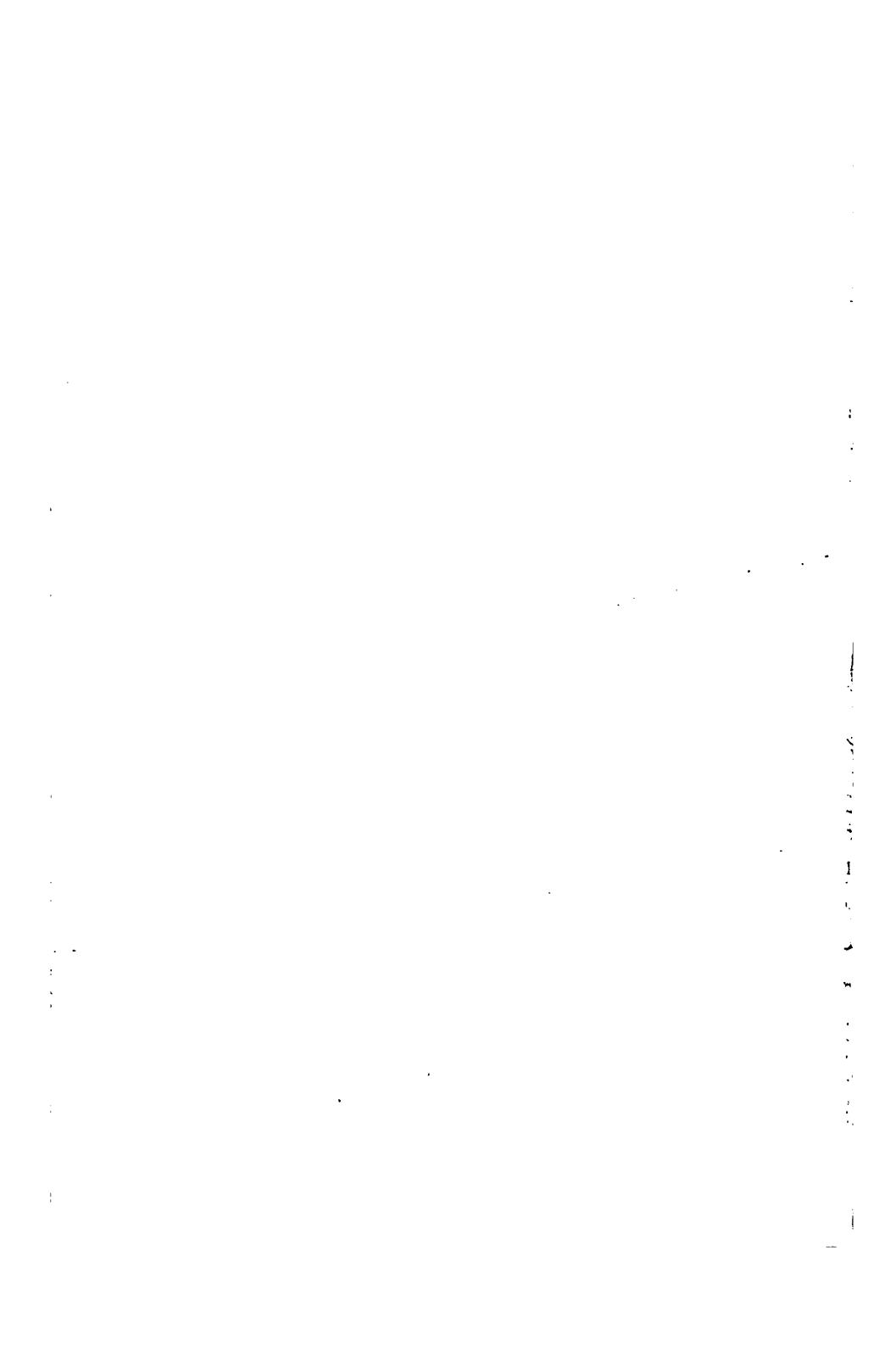
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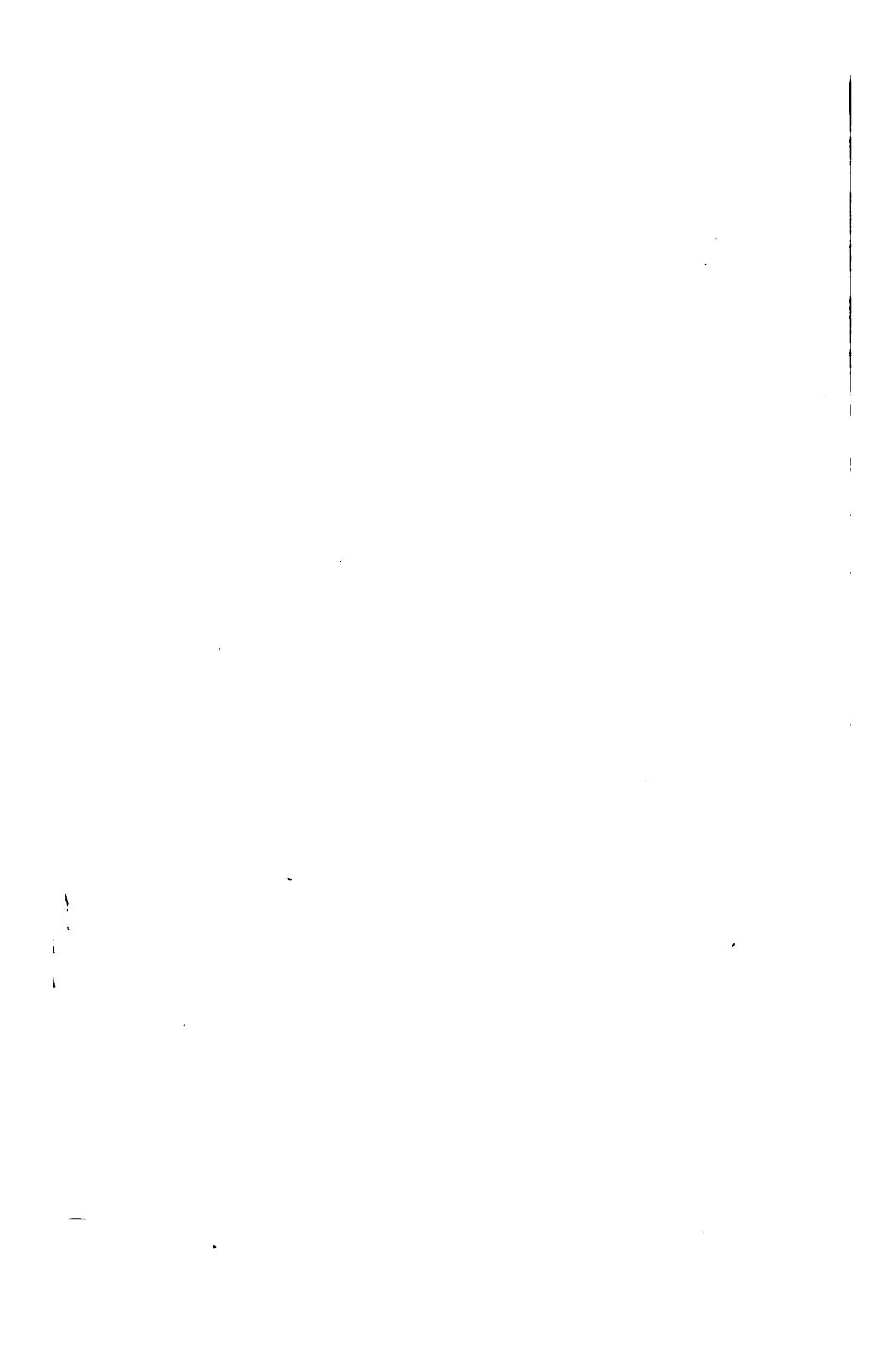






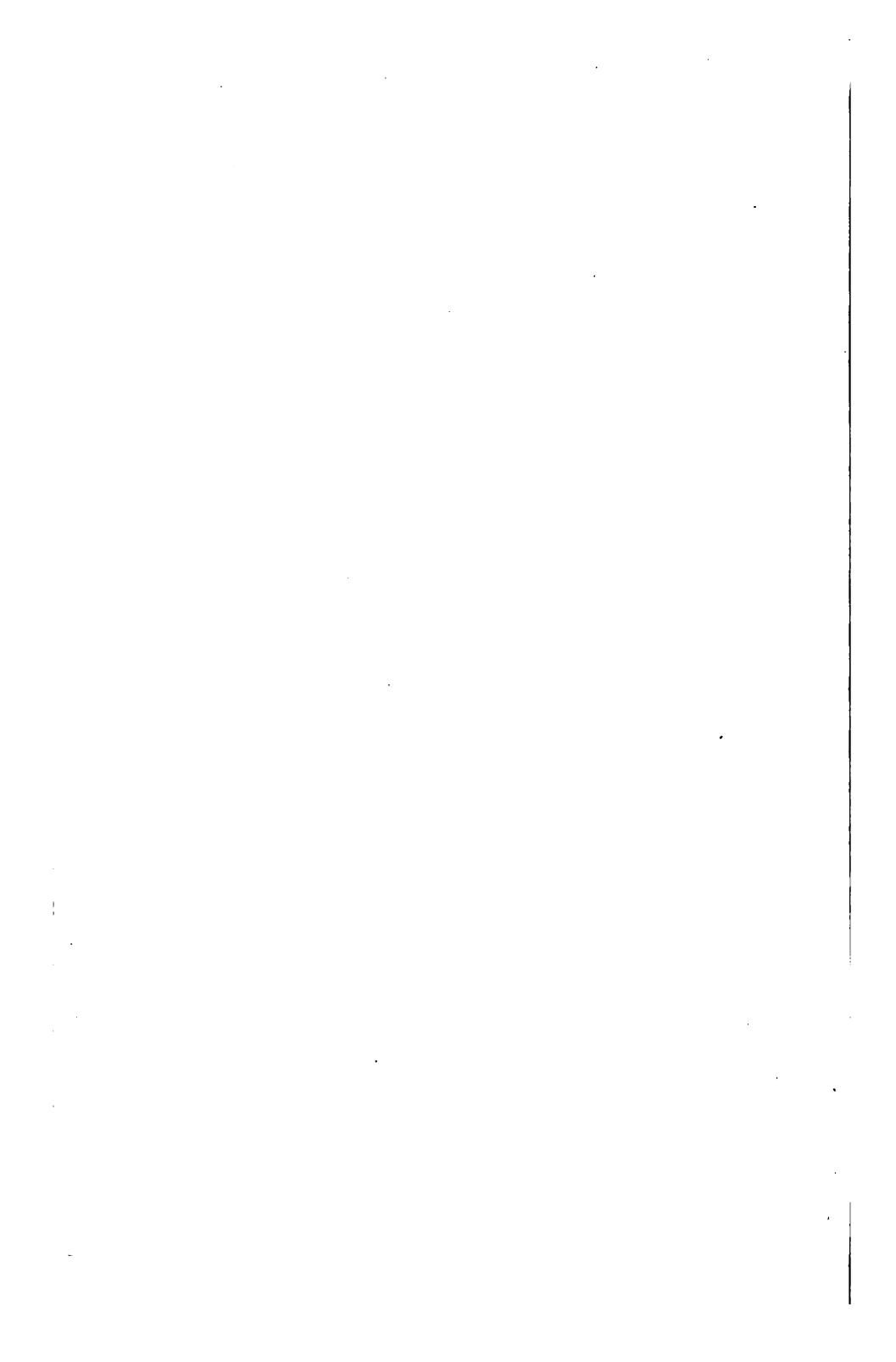






THE
DIARY
OF A
DREAMER





◎

THE
DIARY
OF A DREAMER

M. BY
Mrs. ALICE DEW-SMITH



*The idle life I lead
Is like a pleasant sleep
Wherein I rest, and heed
The Dreams that by me sweep.*

ROBERT BRIDGES.

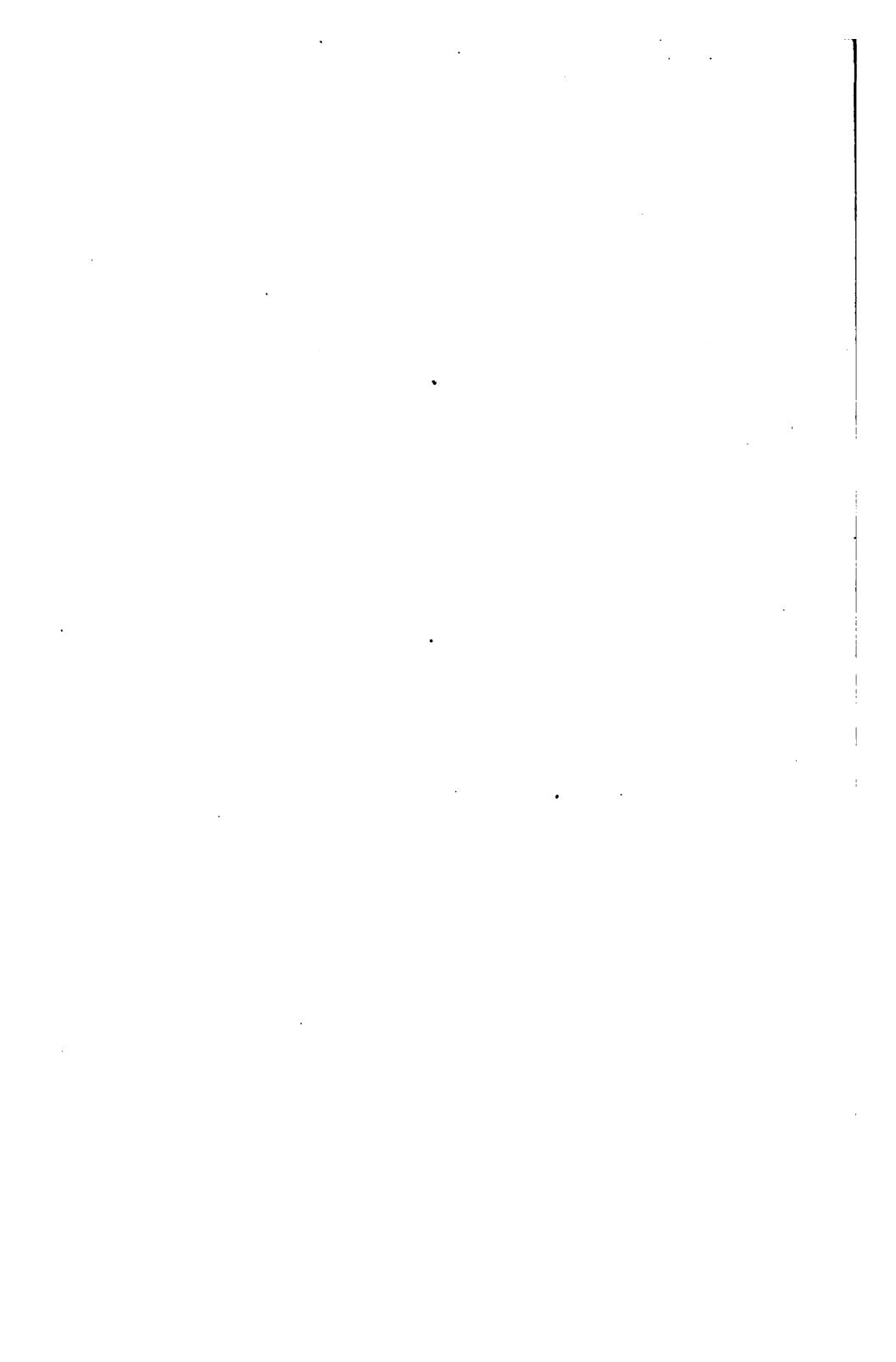
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Dedicated
to
A. G. D.



The Diary of a Dreamer

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I

WE wanted a house. Not that we *The House* actually desired to possess a house. I, personally, should have preferred a gipsy-van, or a tent. But our lot is cast among dwellers in houses ; and to go about in a gipsy-van or tent, when all one's friends and acquaintances live in houses, would be to incur the reproach of eccentricity bordering on insanity.

Some people are born with houses—like snails. When they enter upon life they find a ready-made house, possibly ready furnished waiting for them. But these are fortune's favourites. The majority have no houses to begin with, and have to find them for themselves.

There are two courses open to those who want houses : they may either buy a patch of ground and build a new house upon it ; or they may look about for an empty house that some one else has built and does not want, and live in that.

It is only the privileged few who can allow themselves the enjoyment of building a house. I should regret that I did not

*The
House*

belong to this privileged few the more, were I not convinced that it is only simple-minded and inexperienced people who imagine they can build a house precisely as they wish. Any one who has built a house for himself, or even watched other people doing so, knows how impossible it is.

It seems a simple enough affair at first. You engage an architect and a builder, and possibly an engineer and an electrician, and you say, "I want you to make me a house like this, please," and you imagine that they will go and make it. But though they are quite aware that it is your house, that you are going to pay for it, and that you are going to live in it, each of them wants to build the house to suit himself. They all begin to argue. They tell you you must not have this, and you cannot possibly have that; that it would be utterly absurd to have this, and almost criminal to have that. The result is that, unless you are a person of iron will and determination, you find yourself, after some months of arguing and disputing, an older and a sadder man or woman, as the case may be, saddled with a house the wrong shape and the wrong size, bearing, in short, but the faintest resemblance to the house you had set your heart on, and in your innocence deemed easy of attainment.

My ideal house is a round one, revolving on a pivot—so that one can turn it round

and follow the sun. And I sometimes dream *The House* that I become possessed of wealth and build myself such a house. I am convinced, however, in my waking moments, that were I ten times a millionaire the house of my dream would be beyond my reach. The mere suggestion of a round house on a pivot would make all the architects, builders, engineers, and electricians rise in arms to forbid it.

We had no difficulty, however, in finding an empty house. Numbers of people have houses they do not want and which they are willing to let other people live in for a consideration. The one we found was a sleepy old affair full of dust and cobwebs, sitting in the middle of a garden that had grown into a wilderness all round it. It had been empty for three years, and had apparently got tired of waiting for some one to come and live in it, for it had gone sound asleep, and we had to shake it and bang it before we could get in.

It was the dirtiest house, inside, that I have ever seen. I had to hold up my petticoats, as if I were walking through a farmyard, as we walked from room to room, and to dodge my head to avoid spoiling the spiders' webs. The windows were so clouded with dust that the sun could hardly see through, and the walls had a layer of dust all over them, through which one saw traces of a dado and remnants of æsthetic colouring, which suggested its being a house that had seen better days. It

*The
House*

seemed mournfully to beg us to take it and clean it up and come and live in it. It was tired of being so dirty and lonely, it said. We could not resist such an appeal, so we took it. The house-agent and the landlord were interviewed and wrestled with, there was some signing of papers, and the house was ours for a certain number of years.

The first thing you have to do when you take an old house that some one else has been living in is to scrape it out and clean it. An army of scrapers was turned in and set to work to scrape all the paper and paint off the walls, ceilings, doors, and staircase. They stood up ladders scraping the walls, or sat on the floor scraping the woodwork, or knelt scraping the doors. They did it in a leisurely way, as if they liked it, and accompanied the pursuit with much whistling and desultory conversation, and varied it with meals which they cooked on a grate in one of the empty rooms, and after which they smoked their pipes for an hour or two. However, for aught we knew, scraping required to be done in this thoughtful, leisurely way. So we let them alone, and in a month or two the inside of the house was entirely scraped out, and nothing remained but the paint and paper they had scraped off and remnants of the meals they had enjoyed scattered about on the floor.

Then a sweeper—a careworn woman—was turned in to sweep it all out; all the dust and

rubbish, and also any of the spiders that had escaped the scrapers. I felt sorry for the poor *House* spiders. They were chivied from the corners and cupboards, and had their webs torn to pieces and their happy homes destroyed by that woman's relentless broom.

But spiders and human beings cannot live together in amity. When the human being comes in at the door, the spider will, if he be wise, go out at the window.

The careworn woman swept for days and days, and made an enormous dust-heap outside the kitchen door, which the dustman, after being threatened with a policeman if he refused, came and reluctantly removed. Then a cheerful woman with red cheeks came in and scrubbed. She scrubbed the dirt off layer after layer, singing hymns the whole time, till the house was fit for the paperers and painters to come in and reline it.

When it was finished it looked quite nice and clean—just like a new doll's house that had come from the toy-shop and was awaiting its furniture. I felt quite pleased with its appearance, and eager to begin and, as in the days of my childhood, "play house."

II

IF there were any truth in the oft-quoted statement that "man wants but little here below," life would be a much simpler affair than it is. Unfortunately the reverse of the statement is the fact. Man wants whole vanloads of things to make existence here below tolerable. And though we have scraped and relined the house, I fear we cannot live in it with any degree of comfort till we have equipped it with furniture, servants—and domestic animals.

It is impossible to attach too much importance to the part played by domestic animals in a household. They should consist of, to begin with, a dog and a cat. In degree of importance the dog comes first. His primary use is to give you that sense of proprietorship which will be the backbone of your domestic career. He is far more efficacious in keeping the fact of your possession before your eyes and those of the world in general than the written deed or contract which you keep locked up in a tin box at your solicitor's. Put a dog into your house, and he at once assumes an attitude of proprietorship. "Now,

look here," he says to the world at large, *Furniture* "this house belongs to *us*, and you will please to remember the fact, and not for a moment suppose that it, or any fragment of it, belongs to *you*. If we approve of you and think you a respectable person, we shall invite you to cross the threshold, and make you welcome. But if not—outside, if you please!"

It is chiefly as an example that a cat is of use. The example of decorum, self-restraint, and becoming deportment, which a cat never fails to present, even in the most trying circumstances, is of the highest use to those engaged in wrestling with the worries of domesticity. No one can lose his temper, his sense of dignity, or behave in a foolish or unbecoming manner, who has a cat ever before his eyes. And as the domestic path is from the very beginning strewn with obstacles calculated to trip one up and cause one to forget oneself, no time should be lost in securing a cat.

Besides this sphere of usefulness which she fills as an example, the cat is extremely decorative. She gives a sort of finish to an establishment, and no domestic hearth can be said to be really complete without her. But the useful purposes that dogs and cats serve are so multitudinous that volumes would not suffice to detail them. Happily they are so well known that such a digression is unnecessary.

*Furni-
ture*

When I saw the huge vanloads of furniture that kept coming, grinding in at the gate one after another, for the space of two days, and disgorging themselves into the house—and then looked at our two insignificant selves, standing there and thinking we wanted it all, I laughed at the absurdity of it. As a matter of fact, one-twentieth part would have more than sufficed for our needs. The other nineteen parts were utterly superfluous, and I doubt not that we should be living in greater comfort at present if we had then and there made a bonfire and burnt all but the absolutely essential.

It is a difficult matter to have one's own way in this world. I have always hated furniture. My idea of happiness is to spend my time in empty rooms, with a few cushions strewed about on the floor. And yet it has been my fate to live all my life crowded up to the neck with tables and chairs. I have frequently desired to go and live in Japan, because I am told they have so little furniture there—no chairs, no beds, no tables—only a mat or two and a screen. But this has been denied me. It was my fate, as I stood on the threshold of our new abode, to watch it gradually being filled fuller with furniture than any house I had ever seen—so full, in fact, that it seemed hardly possible that there would be room for us—hardly possible that any house should be filled so full and not burst.

It is not only on account of the space *Furniture* it takes up that I dislike furniture, but for other reasons as well. There is a clumsiness and stupidity about household furniture that is to me at times quite exasperating. Some one has said that it required generations of immortal dullness to evolve the common sofa and the upright chair. The immortal dullness that went to evolve them seems to have entered into their bones and stayed there. Nothing is so hopelessly dull, so aggressively devoid of intelligence, as household furniture. And on no occasion is this so thrust upon your notice as when you are settling into a new house. You tumble a pile of furniture into a room and leave it there while you go and see to something else, hoping that if you leave it alone for a little it will dispose of itself in some way—get into the corners at least, instead of blocking up the doorway. You go back and look at it, anticipating that such an adjustment has taken place. You find it blocking up the doorway in precisely the same clumsy pile as when you left it, with precisely the same blockhead expression of stupidity. You go away and give it another chance. You look in again, and there it sits. Then you give it an impatient push, when it falls heavily on to your toe, and sits there, —too loutishly imbecile to move off—till your screams call the household to your aid.

*Furni-
ture*

That anything possessed of four legs—or, at the least, feet, should be so devoid of intelligence makes one positively gasp.

Furniture is too, I think, a constant reproach to the honesty and uprightness of us human beings. Man is an upright animal—but he has his weaknesses. And one of them is a tendency to collapse at times; to forsake the upright for the horizontal position occasionally—in short, to lie on the ground and rest. Instead of admitting this weakness like a man, he devises all sorts of things to catch him and support various parts of his body before they reach the ground, so that he may deceive himself and the world in general into the belief that he is still upright, though a trifle crooked. It seems to me that it would be far more dignified if he would acknowledge the fact at once that he is a feeble creature and cannot always stand upright, and, abandoning chairs, sofas, and bedsteads, lie simply and unaffectedly on the floor.

I thought of all this as I watched the furniture pouring into the house. But my thoughts were helpless to stem the current. In it poured, with the result that at the end of a week the house was chock full of furniture. Then we ourselves walked in and took possession.

III

A N air of mystery surrounds the plumber and his work. The fact that he pursues his calling in dark corners with the help of a candle causes us to view him with suspicion. And stories of men who came saying they wished to "plumb," and being given a candle by the unsuspecting maidservant, went and burgled instead, have strengthened our tendency to look at him askance. At the same time one cannot help feeling for him a kind of respectful awe, as for one possessed of an insight into the internal anatomy of one's house not given to ordinary mortals. When he comes and tells you your pipes are all wrong, you feel very much as you do when the doctor comes and tells you your inside is all wrong—you quail before his scrutinising eye, and beg him to put them right again.

I do not, however, dislike the plumber. I am inclined to think that he is not such a villain as some people would have one suppose. I have seen him under various aspects, and he has always seemed to me a perfectly harmless individual, content, if you give him a candle and a dark corner, to plumb quietly and

*Plum-
bers and
Electri-
cians*

patiently for hours without any one being any the worse.

But I confess to a morbid horror of that more modern product, the electrician. I dislike electricity. A thunderstorm reduces me to a state of abject terror, even when it rages among distant hills. To catch the awe-inspiring monster, bring him into our very houses, and envelop ourselves in him, as in a network, seems to me monstrous foolhardiness. Electricity appears, however, to be gradually and insidiously adding itself to that ever-growing list of things that we cannot possibly do without. And, nowadays, the electrician walks in as naturally as the plumber, and lights you up and sets you tinkling before you know where you are.

Apart from the dislike of electricity that proceeds from fear and a conviction that sooner or later it will tire of running about in wires and doing our paltry bidding, and, bursting its bonds, will blow us all into perdition, I particularly dislike it in its domestic forms of light and bell-ringer. The ostentatious vulgarity of electric light and the inhuman hardness of electric bells are, to my mind, poor substitutes for the kindness of the old-fashioned bell, and the cosy warmth of the homely candle.

The old-fashioned bell had an individuality. It was a person, sympathetic and responsive, and capable of an infinite variety of expres-

sions. It would answer to the lightest touch, and ring you diffidently, boldly, tenderly, angrily, according to the mood of the ringer. One sighs to think that it is rapidly becoming extinct and that a hideous mechanical rattle is taking its place. It is true that we have a few old-fashioned bells left. There is Big Ben. And the muffin-bell. But I have no doubt that in the next generation Big Ben will roar and rattle to the press of a button, and a monotonous, metallic clatter will herald the muffin-man's approach.

As I have remarked before, one seldom gets one's own way in this world. And in the matter of bells I have not been an exception. The walls are already darned with electric wires, and the "t-r-r-r-r" of electric bells echoes from one end of the house to the other. Whereas it was formerly a pleasure to ring a bell, now I never put forth my finger to press the button (in itself a hideous object) without a mental apology to the whole house for the horrid clatter I am about to make. Worse still. Electric light is already flaring in bunches from the ceiling and sticking in blobs from the walls.

There are periods in our lives when we become for the time being the unconscious puppet of circumstances. Drifting somehow into midstream we are carried swiftly and smoothly along without bumping against anything, so that we hardly realise how far

we have gone till we are landed against some promontory or obstacle. The change from motion to rest rouses us. We rub our eyes and look about us, and probably see that we have landed just where we least desired to find ourselves. That is what had happened to me. It was not till the plumber and electrician had accomplished their ends and gone away, that I suddenly opened my eyes to what had been going on, and realised that that thing had happened to me which, above all others, I dreaded—I had a house. Not a nice little Japanese house, made of bamboo and coloured paper, that one could blow down with a pair of bellows when one tired of it, but a solid house made of bricks and stones, and with its foundations firmly rooted in the bowels of the earth, looking as if it would defy the ravages of time and exist for ever.

The law of gravity has always been a nightmare to me. To feel that we are obliged to go creeping about close to the ground, hugging the earth ; that we cannot raise ourselves even a foot or two without coming down again such a bump that it hurts, is to me an exasperating thought. And that we should encourage and aggravate the odious law, by fastening our houses into the earth's very entrails (for fear they should blow away, forsooth !) and tying ourselves to them with chains of iron, seems to me insane perversity. We cannot blow away, even if we

wanted to. It is as much as we can do to *Plumbers and move even when tied to nothing.*

The odious truth has forced itself upon me. *Electricians*
Here I am firmly established in a house, with
no hope of escape. Here I am—I who have
always valued my liberty above everything—
chained by hundreds of chains to a domestic
hearth, my thoughts forced to occupy them-
selves with such things as beef, dust, domestic
servants, accounts. A profound gloom seemed
to emanate from the roof and walls of the
house, and settle down on my spirit. I
thought regretfully of the pleasant pictures
I had been wont to paint of floating about
on the ocean of life in a nautilus shell ;
flitting about the world like a butterfly, rest-
ing lightly here, lightly there ; taking a peep
here, a peep there, never settling down unless
in the humour for rest. And then as I con-
trasted it with the odious reality, a fit of
impotent rage shook me. “I do not *want*
this abominable house !” I cried. “I will
not *have* this confounded house !”

I fled from it to the remote end of the
garden, from whence I could not see it, and
wished fiercely that a whirlwind would come
and blow it away, or an earthquake swallow
it up. I thought sympathetically of dynamiters.
After all, there was something to be said for
them. They, in their own way, protested
against this odious habit of gluing ourselves
to the earth.

No whirlwind nor earthquake came to my aid. The house was still standing there when I got back. I looked at its outside. One of the blinds in an upstair window was half down, which gave it a sly, half-amused look, as if it were eyeing me sympathetically. "Come in out of the wet," it seemed to say (for it had begun to rain). "It is quite pleasant and cosy inside. There is a bright fire and tea waiting for you. A house is really not such an awful thing as you imagine."

I went in as it suggested. As I sat over the fire with a cup of tea and a muffin I told myself that I was the victim of circumstances, and that there was nothing for it but to make the best of it. Fate had decided that I was to be a housekeeper. I must be a housekeeper to the best of my ability. Yet, if some one had come to me at that moment with a little tent in his hand and said, "Take this little tent, and give me your great, lumbering house," how gladly would I have complied !

IV

WE have scraped, relined, and furnished "Play-
the house, and now we have wound *ing* *House*,
it up and set it going. Instead of *House*,
a cold shell of a house with neither breath
nor life in it, it has become, so to speak, a
living creature. Warm air circulates through
its passages, ruddy heat glows in its rooms.
Its eyes, which before were blank and closed,
now open early in the morning to let in light
and look out at the world. Movement and
bustle go on inside where all was stagnant ;
light shines where all was darkness. In
short, the house has become a different
being—a person of importance instead of a
nonentity.

Though surrounded by other houses, it had
stood aloof and apart while it was empty,
holding no communication with the rest of
the world. It was out of the thoroughfare
of human affairs. No one took any notice
of it, nor spoke to it, not even the baker's
boy. It was as lonely and solitary as if it
stood in the midst of a desert. But now it
is inhabited all this is changed. The other

“Playing House”

houses have suddenly awakened to the fact that they have a neighbour. Their windows, which formerly bestowed not so much as a cursory glance at it, gleam with curiosity, interest, and sympathy. Hundreds of little tendrils have begun to dart between it and the neighbouring houses ; streams of communication to flow backwards and forwards. Instead of standing isolated and alone, cut off from its fellows, it has become one of a large family. Not only is it fixed securely to the earth by tangible roots of brick and mortar, but it is as firmly tied to its surrounding neighbours by thousands of invisible social threads.

No sooner have the plumbers and electricians cleared out, leaving me to realise, too late, that I am firmly fixed in a brick-and-mortar house, than this process of annexation has begun, which is to tie me still more firmly to the spot. I find myself, in short, busily engaged in receiving and paying calls.

It is very much like the old game we used to play when we were children ; and we feel very much as we did in the old days when, with a doll under our arm, we sat side by side on the sofa trying to ape the stiff demeanour and artificial manner of conversation which in our eyes were the chief features of paying calls. “Playing house,” we called it. In those days, as now, it was

a purely feminine game. Occasionally a boy "Play-
with a domestic turn of mind would insinuate *ing*
himself into the circle and enter into the *House*"
spirit of the game like any girl. But as a
rule their attitude was one of scornful indifference,
or, at best, of curiosity tinged with
contempt for the supreme silliness of girls.
With feminine instinct we realised that the
game was one for girls only, and forbore to
court the adherence of the boys. They did
not understand the game ; we dreaded their
jeers. And besides, it was a game for two, or
at most four. It could, indeed, be played by
one alone, with a doll or an imaginary partner.
The boys, on the other hand, were always
anxious in their games for the allegiance of
the girls. It was impossible to have too many
soldiers or too many pirates. When the
number could swell to a dozen or more, then
the game went with the spirit and swing of
reality. And though boys were best, girls
were better than nothing. "What is the
good of playing house ? 'How do you do,
Mrs. Jones, and how is your little girl ?'"
they would mimic with finnicking affection,
and call the shamefaced colour to our
cheeks. "Soldiers is much more fun. Come
on !" As a rule we were glad enough to go.
In our heart of hearts we knew that soldiers
was much more fun. But somehow it
seemed natural to play house. Generations
of playing house had given our minds a bend

“Playing House”

in that direction. We turned to it mechanically and played it automatically.

We still play it mechanically and automatically. And an artificial demeanour is still its chief feature. But time has brought to it certain differences. We must play it now whether we will or no, whether in the mood for it or not. And we must be prepared to play it at any moment and for any length of time—all day, if necessary. To refuse to play ; to say, as of old, “I will not play this silly game,” puts us beyond the pale of civilisation. We may still prefer soldiers and pirates. But soldiers and pirates are more than ever the prerogative of the boys, and their attitude towards “house” has become even more indifferent than it was of yore.

The fact that we despise it makes us overlook the fact that it is a game requiring considerable quickness, and absolute control over one's thoughts. It requires a power of rapidly recalling the mind from wherever it happens to be wandering, and suddenly readjusting it to new surroundings, making it grasp a new situation in the twinkling of an eye. We may be engaged in reading a novel, far away in the regions of romance, and oblivious for the time being of any world but the world of our story. Suddenly the door opens, and a name is flung like a bombshell into the middle of the room—a name

which in all probability we have never heard “*Play-*
before. Before we have had time to collect *ing*
our wandering thoughts, the owner of the *House*”
name is before us in the flesh, smilingly
anxious to take us by the hand and engage us
forthwith in conversation. We have no time
to make up our mind what we are going to
talk about, but we know that we must begin
to talk at once ; for a pause is unpermissible.
Luckily, it is not always necessary for us to
start the conversation. The smiling owner
of the strange name, whose sudden apparition
can scarcely be so much of a surprise to her-
self as it is to you, has had time to make up
her mind, and, as a rule, she begins. She
begins to talk about the weather.

There is a tendency among foolish, priggish
people to despise the weather as a topic of
conversation. They think that generations
of conversing about it have exhausted it
as a subject of talk. They fail to realise
that as long as the weather continues to
change, it is inexhaustible as a subject of
conversation ; or to see that for the purposes
of starting a conversation it is, and always
will be, unrivalled. It is impersonal ; it is a
subject on which the meanest intellect has
something to say, and it is of interest to
everybody. Moreover, long practice in
talking about it has given us a certain glib-
ness, and a set of remarks of the nature of a
formula that can be exchanged mechanically,

“Playing House”

leaving the mind free to collect materials for the next subject. It is, besides, a subject of endless variety, and the remarks and comments its behaviour and misbehaviour suggest are simply infinite.

v

CHRISTMAS DAY ! Already we have *An Impressionist Dream* spent four years in the old house, and I look through my bedroom window at a familiar scene. Familiar and yet dazzlingly disguised ; for snow has fallen during the night, and ground, roofs, and trees are covered with a wonderful, silent whiteness. For the last hour, too, frost and sunshine have been busy weaving a veil of ecstatic glittering over everything, which gives an air of unreality to the scene. As I gaze, my dream comes back to me.

Wild impressionist pictures that I had seen during the day had possessed themselves of my brain, so that I could not sleep. I turned and tossed, while weird streaks of colour and blobs of paint jostled each other on the lantern-sheet of my closed eyes. When I dozed at last it was only to wake again.

As I opened my eyes I became aware that the room was full of a red glow. I got out of bed and looked out of the window. The sky was in a blaze, and the garden, which was covered with snow and frost,

*An
Impres-
sionist
Dream*

was glistening like a Christmas card. At first I thought it was an Aurora Borealis, for great rays of different colours were shooting up into the sky. Then, from the crackling and roaring that was going on, I thought it must be a terrific bonfire. Suddenly I realised what it was. The end of the world had begun !

I reflected that the important thing was to keep one's head and not attempt to save too much. I went and woke Max, and then putting on my dressing-gown and slippers, and taking a few necessaries in a hand-bag, I ran downstairs into the garden. The crackling and roaring was so loud that I could hear nothing else. Blue and pink flames like those from a plum-pudding were dancing in the sky, and streaking the snow with blue and pink shadows.

I called to the animals to follow and began to run. They all four galloped in front. But they seemed to have no idea of the seriousness of the situation, for the dogs kept stopping to play "swallow-my-head," and the cats kept waiting to sharpen their claws in the trunks of the trees. Max caught us up when we had run some little way. He was carrying the thermometer screen from the kitchen garden. I reflected that man always keeps his head in an emergency and remembers what is important and what not. "Look back at the garden !" he cried. " You may

never see it again, and it's simply stunning!" *An Impres-*
I turned and looked.

The fire seemed to have melted the snow *sionist* and turned winter to summer. The trunks *Dream* of the chestnuts shone sapphire-blue beneath a canopy of pink leaves. The ground was carpeted with poppies, cornflowers, sunflowers, carnations, and roses, that scintillated like a kaleidoscope. The crimson rambler that trails over the sundial had grown so rampant that it hung in festoons from tree to tree; and above the sundial, through a gap in the chestnuts, I could see a misty, pale green landscape spotted with poppies, and with a straw-coloured road winding through it. The whole reminded me of a picture I had seen somewhere.

We turned and went on running. The country through which we ran varied very much. Now we were running through fields and fields of poppies, now through acres and acres of golden haystacks shining through blue mist. There were so many of these latter that it was quite difficult to thread one's way through them. You were always bumping up against them. I noticed that when you looked closely at them they were made up of blobs of paint of extraordinary colours—reds, blues, greens, yellows, and purples. But, seen through the mist, a little way off they looked soft and yellow.

"How they will burn when the fire reaches

*An
Impres-
sionist
Dream*

them!" I thought, and a moment later I heard a terrific burst of crackling, and looking round saw that they were all in flames. I was running through a wet, green meadow at the time, and reflected that the wet grass would check the fire a little. On ahead I saw rocks and ravines where I knew we should be safe, and in a few minutes we had reached them. Max and the animals who were in front seemed to grow quite small on the rocks. The cats and dogs looked insects, and Max with the thermometer screen like a midget. I reflected that if they were not going to grow back to their proper size again, it would have been better to stay and be burned.

However, when I came out into the station, which was at the end of a long ravine, I was relieved to find that they had regained their normal size, and were waiting for me on the platform. The station was a vast place like the infernal regions, except that the atmosphere was pale blue. It was full of trains with prancing engines that were snorting and chattering like the engines in Rudyard Kipling's story-book. The pale-blue atmosphere was dotted with their lights. Those near at hand looked like Chinese lanterns, while those far off reminded me of distant Jubilee bonfires. My cousin Eugenia was running up and down the platform looking for a carriage. She was very unsuitably

dressed in a ball-gown, a long evening cloak *An*
that flew behind her, and pink satin slippers. *Impres-*
When she saw us she rushed up and embraced *sionist*
us and said, "The Mars train is full, I can't *Dream*
find a single place!" Then I saw that all
the prancing engines had names in electric
light on their foreheads—Mars, Venus, Saturn,
and so on. "Oh, we *must* go to Mars!" I
cried. "I couldn't bear Venus, or Saturn,
or *any* of the others." Just then I saw that
Max, with his usual presence of mind, had
found an empty carriage and was opening the
door and beckoning to me.

"No dogs allowed!" said a conductor, as
we were about to jump in. "But I have got
their tickets," said Max (who never forgets
anything), flourishing some enormous yellow
tickets in his face. The conductor bowed to
the ground and opened the door. The cats
and dogs, however, had anticipated him by
jumping in through the window, and the
former were already climbing into the hat-
rack when we got in. I hoped Eugenia
would go in another carriage. But she
insisted on getting into ours, though there
really was not room, and on filling the seats
with pale mauve and salmon-coloured silk
cushions and lavender-bags—like those I had
been making for the bazaar. "We are
starting!" said Max, who was looking out of
the window. "You had better put your
heads out and say goodbye." We all hung

*An
Impres-
sionist
Dream*

our heads out and waved our handkerchiefs to the staff of polite officials on the platform. And as they raised their caps the train rose up into the air with a *whish* like a rocket.

It was a delicious feeling sailing up through the blue sky. I looked down and saw that we were leaving a golden track behind—a great sweeping curve of fire. I looked up and around. The sky was full of trains with prancing engines rushing in all directions, all leaving tails of fire behind them, like shooting stars. I wondered that it had never occurred to me before that shooting stars and comets were nothing but trains taking people from one world to another—from burning worlds to new ones.

I looked round to see if we were anywhere near Mars, and some way off in the sky saw a beautiful pink and green globe that seemed to be lighted with electricity. After looking for a few minutes I could distinguish golden parallel lines running across it in one part. “That *must* be Mars ! ” I cried in excitement.

Max said he supposed it was, but that there was no knowing whether the train would stop there. “That is the worst of these trains,” he said, “you never can count on them. There is no knowing when they will start, or when they will arrive, or where. We may find ourselves landed in Venus, or anywhere. We may, which would be much worse, go

on for ever and ever, and never be heard of *An Impres-*
again." *sionist Dream*

We seemed, however, to be getting nearer to Mars. *Soon*, I thought with a thrill of excitement, I shall know what those stripes that puzzle people so, really are. As I looked other lines, which had been too faint to show, began to shine out, till there were five parallel lines like a bar of music. And in another moment I could see golden balls like notes hanging to them.

"It's a *tune*!" I almost shrieked, "and I can **HEAR** it!!" For as I uttered the sound a vast melody was wafted towards me—a melody wild, weird, melancholy, and with the remoteness of eternity about it, but so packed with fearful, portentous, soul-shaking meaning that I felt my brain giving way from sheer astonishment.

"It is the secret of the universe!" I gave a smothered yell—and awoke in my bed. The Christmas wafts were singing beneath my window in the snow.

At first it seemed to be the same tune, and to be trying to express some of the same overwhelming meaning. But even while I tried to grasp the meaning, to remember the secret, they began to die out of it, like colour out of a soap-bubble. The tune grew more and more commonplace and familiar every moment. By the time I was fully awake I realised that it was nothing but "Good King Wenceslas."

ALREADY Christmas has whisked away—already it is rapidly retreating into the distance and getting smaller and smaller, as is the way with such landmarks on the path of life. And now there is a pause—a sort of lull while we await the New Year. All of us wonder what sort of fellow he will show himself to be ; all eagerly hope he may single us out for Good Luck.

While London is wrapped in a blanket of fog, we in the country are enjoying an orthodox Christmas—one like the delightful old Christmas cards of thirty years ago, with their frosted trees and robin redbreasts picking up crumbs. The trees, to their tiniest twigs, are outlined in glistening hoar-frost. Each leaf and blade of grass has a sparkling white edge. The ground and the roofs of the houses are of an overwhelming whiteness. The sun is shining brightly, and everything sparkles like diamonds ; and the sky, which is clear and wonderful during the day, dyes itself red towards evening to show up the frosted trees.

Even the kitchen garden, so dull at this time of year, looks beautiful with everything glistening in the sun. It is wonderful to see what things of beauty a sprinkling of hoarfrost makes of a bed of prosaic savoy cabbages! As for the leeks, their dull leaves look like beautiful green streaming ribbons trimmed with diamonds.

Though it whirled away so rapidly, Christmas has left its trail behind. There is still a scent of Christmas in the air, and signs of our late dissipation are to be seen everywhere. Sprigs of holly and branches of mistletoe—beginning to look dilapidated and dusty—still hang from the ceilings and decorate the walls. Toys—many of them already broken, alas!—strew the floors, and Christmas cards are scattered everywhere.

As I sit over the fire on this the last day of the year, my eyes wander over an array of Christmas cards propped up among the nick-nacks on my chimney-piece, and thence to my writing-table in the corner of the room, where they rest on two objects, two calendars—the old and the new side by side.

To-night I shall tear off the last remaining sheet of the Dickens Calendar that has watched the year run its course from the wall above my desk.

The new calendar is a “Shakespeare.” A portrait of the poet on the outside gazes from an oval frame straight into my eyes. And

*My
Shake-
speare
Calendar*

beneath the portrait, battened down under a piece of cardboard so that one cannot even read the New Year's greeting, are the wise saws that are to be a running commentary on the coming year. "Fair be thy hopes ; and prosperous be thy life," is the motto on the outside. And Shakespeare's seal and signature beneath, give it a weighty significance.

Since calendars with selections from authors came into vogue I have never been without one hung over my writing-table. I look upon my calendar as my oracle, and like to think that some Fate inspires its utterances to suit my peculiar case—that the motto for the day will foretell the day's event. In moments of doubt or perplexity I frequently dip haphazard into the calendar with a paper-knife, in the belief that Fate will guide my hand to turn up a motto bearing on my situation. Experience of various sorts of calendars, Dickens, Tennyson, and the like, have led me to the conclusion that none but a Shakespeare calendar justifies this faith.

In these days of *réchauffés* and "vamped-up trash," when every one must be meddling and making, everything that can lay claim to mediocrity even, is seized, chopped up, mixed with something else, and offered to the public under a new form. Literary productions are peculiarly harassed in this way. As soon as they appear they are torn limb from limb to furnish newspaper articles : pounded, beaten

up and trimmed with icing and pink sugar to make plays, and chopped into mincemeat to make calendars and birthday books. Few authors can stand this latter treatment. It is a severe test of a man's genius to display it piecemeal in a calendar, and it takes a Shakespeare to emerge triumphant from the ordeal —one whose genius is so vast and deep and indestructible that it fills the very words of his writings, so that, no matter how small a fragment you take, it holds a bit of genius.

The aptness of Shakespeare's remarks, their fitness to the exigencies of life causes me to regard his calendar with a superstitious awe. Time out of mind he has hit the nail of the situation on the head with a precision that has startled me. He has advised, consoled, reflected, and even predicted in a way that has made me exclaim, "Surely this Shakespeare Calendar must have been compiled for me, and me alone!" Sometimes he has commented with a sort of grave reproof after the event; thereby producing the impression that he had watched the course of the day, and, pondering over it, pronounced his dictum.

An instance of this comes to my mind. I was spending an hour, on a wet, gloomy afternoon, waiting for a train at Woking Junction. As I sat on one of the station seats watching the rain drip on the line, I noticed a little group coming along the platform towards me. It consisted of a couple of

policemen and a handcuffed convict. The convict wore a parti-coloured garb—one leg yellow and the other grey, if I remember rightly, and had a round, bullet-shaped, closely cropped head. But it was his face that seized and rivetted my attention. Mute misery, the terror of the hunted beast, and the despair of the human soul, were focussed into a look that stabbed straight into the vitals of my feelings. Such a direct appeal did the look make to me that a chord responded and vibrated in my innermost being. I was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to say something. The dire irrevocableness of his fate, the wild, hopeless feeling that all the world was against him, seized hold of me so forcibly that as he passed I got up involuntarily, compelled to follow him, my whole soul shaken with compassion and the impulse to comfort. But no words came. I looked at him. He looked mutely at me, as if searching for a pin-point of hope. The policemen just then quickened their steps ; I fell behind, and in a minute they were out of sight. An earthquake had heaved in my soul and left me pale and trembling. I sat down on the seat, and by degrees the tumult calmed down and the voice of reason made itself heard. “What business had you to speak to that criminal ? What could you have said even if it had been your business ?” All through my homeward journey the man’s

face haunted me. "If I could only have said *My*
something!" I thought. And again, What *Shake-*
could I have said?
speare
Calendar

When I reached home I went mechanically to my calendar, and this is what I read—

"'Tis all men's office to speak patience
To those that wring under the load of sorrow."

* * * * *

When the hands of the clock pointed to *New*
two minutes to twelve last night I got up, *Leaves*
and, throwing open the window, looked out
into the night. On the first stroke of twelve
a neighbour of ours would, I knew, greet the
New Year by sending up three rockets. As
soon as he had sent them up, it was said, he
would shut himself up in his room and turn
over new leaves.

It was a cold, clear, still night. The sky
was studded with stars, and there was not a
sound to be heard but the ticking of the
clock on the chimney-piece behind me. The
two minutes seemed an eternity. The hands
of the clock, towards which I glanced every
now and then, moved so imperceptibly that I
thought they must have stopped. At last
there was a warning click and a *whirr*, and
at the same time the first stroke of the church
clock fell on the cold night air with a clang
that vibrated and died gradually away till it
was caught up and carried on by the next.

Before the first stroke had been lost in the second there was a *whish* of something rushing through the air, and up shot a rocket. The bright star with its golden trail cut its way through the deep transparent blue sky, making the real stars look yellow, far away, and insignificant for a time, and then with a muffled "plop" it burst into numerous brightly-coloured stars that fell slowly—slowly—till they disappeared behind the roofs of the houses. Before the last star sank out of sight there was another *whish*, and the second rocket shot up, following almost the same path as the first. It burst into red, blue, and yellow stars, which fell slowly behind the roofs of the houses like the first, and then there was a pause, and I waited for the third.

I waited for some seconds and then made up my mind that for some reason there would be no third rocket. I was about to withdraw my head and shut the window when there was a *whish* close to my elbow, and before I knew where I was I was rushing up through the cold, frosty air with the third rocket—clinging to something, I did not know what at the time, but which I now suppose must have been the stick of the rocket. Like my dream of Christmas Eve, it was a delicious sensation, containing all the rapture of the switchback railway and none of its unpleasantness. The rush must have lasted

about three seconds. Then there was a pause *New Leaves* of balance in mid-air for about two more *Leaves* seconds. Then there was an explosion, and the rocket burst into thousands of coloured stars that seemed to fill the air all around as far as I could see. I found myself resting on a blue star and sinking slowly through the air with a delightful wafting feeling. The star was transparent, and, looking through it, I saw that we had gone much higher up than I had imagined. For the town lay miles below us, looking like a tiny toy town lying in the valley. As we sank lower and got nearer the earth the houses grew larger, and suddenly I discovered that the blue star was made of Röntgen Rays which not only enabled one to see through the roofs into the houses, but lighted them up, so that one could see every detail with distinctness. At the same time I heard a great rustling—like the sound in St. James's Hall when every one turns over a page of the book of the words at the same time.

“They are turning over new leaves!” I cried, as with a thrill of excitement I caught sight of a flashing of white pages that was making a sort of white flicker all over the town. “Let me go and turn over my own before it is too late.”

I clutched at something in my lap. It was my Shakespeare Calendar, and I was sitting in my arm chair over the fire. The hands of

*New
Leaves*

the clock pointed to five minutes past twelve.
Outside a wind had risen, and was rustling
the leaves of the fir trees.

The question that puzzles me is, Did I see
the New Year in or did I not?

VII

WHEN mine own familiar friend came *At my Writing Table* the other day and began asking me all sorts of questions as to how I wrote *Table*—my methods, and so forth—I could not make out what he was driving at until I asked him point-blank if he was trying to interview me. Then he admitted that he was collecting material for an article on authors, and wanted to find something about the ways of literary women. He had seen one or two letters from authors describing their methods, which had interested him greatly, and he wanted a few more, especially from ladies, so as to be able to compare and draw conclusions. I told him that I really did not know how I wrote. But I felt flattered at being called an author, so I said I would take notes of my methods the following day, when I hoped to finish a story I was writing for a periodical, and would let him know. When I reviewed my morning's work on the evening of the following day, I decided not to send them—for reasons that will be apparent.

There was nothing particular about the day. It was rather hot, perhaps, but other-

wise average. And I was in an average state of mind—neither specially perturbed, nor depressed, nor excited about anything.

I breakfasted at eight o'clock, intending to begin work at half-past nine, and gave orders that no one was to enter my room, nor disturb me in any way, till one o'clock. I became absorbed in an exciting French novel over my first piece of toast, and was only recalled from its depths by the clock striking nine. I had intended going out immediately after breakfast to pick flowers, as those in my sitting-room were beginning to droop. But I had only time to poke them about a little, pull out the deadest ones and throw them out of the window, and attend to my domestic duties, so as to be in my sitting-room at half-past nine.

My writing-table is one of those old oak bureaus, full of drawers and pigeon-holes, that shuts up. When I opened it this morning I found it in a very untidy state. I had been called away in a hurry the day before, and my papers were in the greatest confusion. It was absolutely necessary to dust and tidy it before setting to work. I did so very thoroughly, sorting my papers and tearing up the rubbish, and having filled my ink-pot, and put a new nib in my pen, I sat down to begin. The story I was in the middle of, was a short sketch, of which the chief feature was

a girl. I had left them the day before, seated under an oak tree in a copse, where I intended things to come to a climax. I transported myself in spirit to the oak tree, and sat there with them for some time wondering what they said to each other. It was, as I said, very hot, and it was quite pleasant to imagine one's self under an oak tree. So I sat there a long time while my subconscious ego, or whatever that part of us that works automatically is called, drew cart-wheels with multitudinous spokes, squares filled with infinitesimally fine lines, and squiggles of every variety all over my blotting-paper—a nasty habit it has, and of which I have tried in vain to break it. The clock struck ten as I was finishing my fifteenth cart-wheel. I reprimanded myself severely, and said I really must begin. So I dipped my pen in the ink, and, on second thoughts, put it down again and took up a pencil. I would write a pencil sketch and copy it. The pencil was blunt, I looked at all my pencils (there were six on the table), and found none of them quite satisfactory as to points. So I sharpened them all, making exquisitely fine points, and put them in order of size in front of me, and selected the longest to begin with. My best manuscript paper was running short. Rather than waste it on a pencil sketch I went to a drawer and got out some horrid stuff the stationer had sent me by mistake. It had no

*At my
Writing
Table*

lines, and as I cannot write on paper without lines there was nothing to do but rule it. This, with a new ruler I had been given the day before, and one of my finely-pointed pencils, was quite a pleasant task. Like Mr. Pepys, I "took great pleasure to rule the lines even." In fact, I went on ruling till I had ruled nearly a quire. And not even then content, I went back and ruled a wide margin on every sheet.

Then I really began. I wrote a few sentences on the top of the sheet. They were not very satisfactory. As I thought how I could best emend them, my eyes wandered vaguely over the little objects of my writing-table.

It is a mistake to have too many objects on one's writing-table. They are apt to distract the attention. I have as few as possible—only those that are absolutely necessary, in fact. They are: a black pig, a diminutive bronze owl, and two dancing bears; two photographs—one of St. Francis of Assisi, and one of my best friend—in frames; and last, but not least, an ink-pot in the shape of a Pierrot, with a large white frill and buttons, and a head that takes off, with a most beguiling expression. I noticed, as I was vaguely trying to emend the hero's remarks, that the glass of the photo frames was very dusty, and on examining them closely found that the dust had got inside and was making the

photos dirty. This was not to be tolerated another moment. I removed the photographs, dusted them, polished up the glass on each side, and put them in again. As I was putting them back in their places my eyes fell upon my black pig leaning in a helpless sort of way against the owl, as if there was something the matter with his leg.

At my Writing Table

There are few people in the world to whom I am more attached than to my black pig. He has been my constant companion for years. Where I go he goes, wrapped in cotton wool, for he is made of Killarney bog-oak, and is rather brittle. On one of his journeys, to my great grief, he lost a leg, and as no amount of searching could discover the missing limb I had to make him a leg of sealing wax, carefully carved to resemble the one he had lost. I picked him up hurriedly now, and found that a little bit of his sealing wax leg had been chipped off, so that he could not stand properly, but had to lean against the owl for support. It was impossible to write while my pig was in pain. I lit a candle, hunted for a bit of sealing wax, and employed all my skill in neatly mending his foot.

I felt a new woman when it was accomplished, and ready to tackle any number of lovers under oak trees. I returned to my story, and in a few minutes the hero had made a very pretty and rather smart remark to the lady about the dress she was wearing.

*At my
Writing
Table*

It was an unfortunate remark, for it reminded me that I had omitted to send my dressmaker some lace I had promised her for my new evening dress. I jumped up at once and did it up in a parcel, and wrote her a note to remind her not to make the sleeves so enormous as in my last dress. Doing up the parcel gave me a fit of restlessness. I walked about the room, moving the furniture and ornaments, and straightening the pictures for some minutes, and then, seating myself in one of the arm chairs to see if it were in a good position, I caught sight of my shoes, and observed that they were disgracefully shabby. It was imperative that I should write for a new pair at once before I forgot it. I only wrote a postcard, but I had to look out the description of those I usually wore in the catalogue, and this took some little time.

I then seated myself again at my writing-table, and, sternly resisting an impulse to wash Pierrot's frill, which was spotted with ink, transported myself again to the oak tree. But at this point I gradually became aware that I was extremely hungry, and, thinking it over, found it was hardly to be wondered at, since, owing to the French novel, I had had hardly any breakfast. It is impossible to write when one is hungry. I rang the bell, and ordered a glass of wine and a cake.

As I ate a slice of cake I took up the

newspaper, which happened to be lying on a chair at my side, and began to read the births, deaths, and marriages. From thence I passed mechanically to the social column, thence to the parliamentary debate, and finally became absorbed in an exciting law case. Just as I got to the end the clock struck one. What had become of twelve I do not know. I certainly had not heard it. I threw down the paper and turned to my story. I had written six lines. I read them and thought them abominable, so I tore them up and went down to luncheon.

At my Writing Table

The question forces itself upon me, “Do I always write like this? and if so, can it possibly have anything to do with what I have always considered my unaccountable want of success in the literary world?”

VIII

I VERILY believe that Nansen did not struggle more to reach the North Pole than I to send that postal order for half a crown to Mrs. Brown. If I were to set forth a truthful statement of the efforts I have made to encompass the wretched thing ; the dozens of times I have got as far as the post-office and found I had forgotten my purse ; the scores of times I have taken my purse and have forgotten to go to the post-office ; the hundreds of times that, after saying to myself as I got out of bed in the morning, "I will send it to-day without fail," I have failed, people might think I was mentally deficient.

I have always found a postal order a troublesome thing to, so to speak, get under way. Knowing this, it was thoughtless of me to say lightly (as I did) to Mrs. Brown when leaving her, "I will send you a postal order to-morrow." I might have known that I should not send that postal order to-morrow, nor the next day, nor the day after that. I may as well confess at once that it is now more than two years since I made the remark, and that

I have not yet sent that postal order. I have, *A Postal Order* moreover, given up all hope of ever sending it.

Thinking it over, it occurs to me to wonder *for* why I did not send one of the maids, or *Half a* William, or the boot boy, to buy it. It seems *Crown* to me now that it would have been simple enough. I do not know why I did not do so. I only know I didn't.

On one or two occasions I got so near sending it that it was, so to speak, touch and go with it. I started one day with a half-crown and a penny in my hand, meaning to go straight to the post office, buy the postal order, come straight back, put it in an envelope, and post it without more ado. When I was about five yards from my own gate I met a familiar friend on a bicycle, apparently coming to call on me. I tried to pass her with a smile and a wave of the hand, indicating that I was in a desperate hurry and could not wait. But she would not allow it. She stopped just in front of me and dismounted. "Where are you going?" she asked. "Only to the post-office to buy a postal order," I said, inwardly cursing my inability to tell a fib. "Is it important?" she asked. "Won't it do to-morrow?" "It *is* rather important," I said. Then, catching at a straw, "You go on and wait for me. I shall not be more than twenty minutes." "But I can only stay half an hour!" she cried. "And I am going away for three months to-morrow. Give me the

*A Postal money ; I will run down on my bicycle and
Order get it.” “Oh, no,” I protested weakly. “It
for is not as important as all that. It will do
Half a just as well to-morrow,” and I turned back
Crown with her.*

There is nothing so morally debilitating as failure. After this incident I found myself distinctly less capable of wrestling with the obstacles that beset my path towards the accomplishment of that postal order. Not that I did not wrestle. I wrestled desperately, but quite ineffectually. It seemed as if some fiend had possessed himself of my memory and was playing pranks with it, causing me to forget and remember with exasperating inopportuneness. If I had my purse with me and happened to be in the neighbourhood of the post-office, he would cause me so completely to forget the postal order that I have spent ten minutes in the post-office buying stamps and postcards, weighing parcels, and sending telegrams without the thought of it entering my head. At the same time, he would choose the most inopportune moments for reminding me of it. He made my life a burden to me by confronting me with it in the middle of the night ; in church when I ought to have been attending to the sermon ; at a dinner party ; at any moment, in fact, when it was utterly impossible for me to attend to it.

On one occasion I verily believe he picked

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my pocket rather than allow me to succeed. *A Postal Order for Half a Crown*
I found myself on the steps of the post-office, with my purse, which I had good reason to suppose contained ten shillings in silver, actually in my hand. As I pushed my way through the swing doors and approached the wire grating, I opened it to extract the half-crown and the penny. To my horror it contained only one and sevenpence-halfpenny, neither more nor less. I was so taken aback that I nearly began to cry. I felt I *could* not leave the post-office without that postal order. I would ask the postmaster to send it to be paid on delivery ; I would beg him to let me take it and I would pay next time I passed ; I would borrow half a crown from one of the customers ! As these devices flitted through my mind I looked up and saw the young man behind the grating in an interrogative attitude. "I *wanted* a postal order for half a crown, but I see I have not enough money with me," I said, fumbling in my purse and vaguely hoping that he might offer to sell me an old one cheap, or suggest something. But he did not. He was the most unsympathetic, unsuggestive young man I ever came across. He stared at me and vibrated impatiently till, in order to appease him, I was obliged to buy a dozen penny stamps that I did not in the least want.

After that, I made up my mind that circumstances were "too many" for me, and that I had better give it up. I succeeded in

A Postal Order for Half a Crown almost forgetting it, and should, I think, have done so altogether, if I had not had the misfortune to meet Mrs. Brown at an afternoon party. It was a contingency I had often contemplated. For, though Mrs. Brown lived fifteen miles out of town, I knew she sometimes drove in to see her friends. Indeed, I had often put half a crown in my pocket when going to pay calls, in the hopes that I might meet her. Needless to say, I had on this occasion omitted the precaution. Luckily I had no opportunity of speaking to her. But I was conscious of her in every fibre, even when she was out of sight. Even when engaged in conversation with others I was thinking : "Does she remember that I owe her half a crown ? What does she think of me ? That I have forgotten ? That I kept it on purpose ?" Not only did the thought of it entirely spoil my afternoon, but it roused my conscience, that I had succeeded in quieting, to a state of frantic activity. The whole way back, in the pouring rain, it was clamouring at me to go a mile out of my way to the post office and buy it then and there. I resisted the folly of such a proceeding. But I vowed a solemn vow that before I was a day older that postal order should leave the house in an envelope addressed to Mrs. Brown.

When I reached home I proceeded to tie

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knots in all my pocket-handkerchiefs. I *A Postal* then made a number of little placards with *Order* "Postal Order" printed neatly on them, and *for* stuck one in almost every looking-glass in *Half a* the house. And I put all my rings on the *Crown* wrong fingers. The result was that I came down to breakfast the next morning full of the postal order. There was a telegram on my plate. It was from Miss Green, saying that she had an unexpected holiday, and was coming down to spend the day with me. Miss Green is a hard-working art student who rarely gets a holiday, and is, moreover, a great friend of mine. I was delighted at the prospect of seeing her. She arrived soon after her telegram, and we spent a pleasant day together talking over old times. In the afternoon I set off to walk to the station with her. As I pulled my gloves on while we hurried along, Miss Green said, "Why do you wear one ring on each finger?" I stopped as if I had been shot, and felt in my pocket! Since Miss Green's telegram that morning, in spite of knots in my handkerchiefs, in spite of placards in the looking-glasses, in spite of rings on the wrong fingers I had not once thought of that postal order.

I felt I must tell somebody, so I told Miss Green all about it. She can have had no idea what I had suffered, for she laughed. We were passing the post-office at the

*A Postal
Order
for
Half a
Crown*

moment. "I have half a crown in my pocket," she said. "Come in and we will get it this moment." Miss Green is a woman of action. In less than two minutes I found myself outside the post-office door with a postal order for half a crown actually in my hand. I felt inclined to hug Miss Green. "I will send you a postal order in a day or two," I cried joyfully, as her train moved out of the station.

"Will you?" asked the fiend mockingly. I tried to silence him, but he went on, "Why should you find it any easier to send a postal order to Miss Green than you have found it to send one to Mrs. Brown? Why should you take half a crown from Miss Green, who has none to spare, and give it to Mrs. Brown, who has enough to trim her dress with them if she likes? Besides, you have owed it to Mrs. Brown for so long that a month or so more will make no difference."

It was, I believe, this last argument to which I succumbed. When I reached home I went straight to my desk, put the postal order in an envelope, and addressed it to Miss Green.

There are times when one is obliged to admit that Fate has scored.

IX

LIFE is short. So runs an inscription on *The Flight of Time* the almanac that hangs above my writing-table. So said the copy-books many years ago. But we were so taken up with copying the letters, with making the downstrokes thick and the upstrokes thin ; with the difficulties of the capital L and the little f, that we paid no attention to the sentiment. And if we had we should have rejected it with scorn as utterly false. Life was long—interminably long in those days. A day, with its getting up and its breakfast, its long hours of the morning and its dinner ; its slowly passing afternoon and tea, its going to bed and the long, long black night full of dreams to wind up with, seemed a little lifetime. A week, from Sunday to Sunday, with its set of days unfurling themselves one after the other—oh, so slowly—seemed never ending. And as for a year, with its days upon days, and weeks upon weeks, ending up with Christmas in the dim, dim distance, our minds failed to grasp such an eternity. We sighed to think of the weary ages that must be gone through before we could have another birth-

The Flight of Time day. No, we knew better than to believe that life was short. It was an eternity—a slow succession of days and nights that refused to move one step quicker, no matter how, in our impatience, we implored them to hurry.

But that was long ago. Time, by some gradual, invisible sort of process, has changed his pace. The years have taken to spinning along and whirling past before we have had time to look them well in the face. The New Year slithers in so quietly and rapidly that we should fail to notice him, if it were not for having to write a new date at the top of our paper. "1899 already!" we say to ourselves. "Dear me, it seems only a few minutes since it was 1890! What can have become of the years in between? I can remember nothing about them." A day or two passes, and we suddenly realise that we are half through 1899 already—the year that only the other day was brand new—and that soon it will be old and done with, and Christmas will be here again. Before we have quite recovered from the plum-puddings, mince-pies, and present-giving of the last one, we shall be beginning them all over again; making more plum-puddings and mince-pies, racking our brains again to think what we had better give our friends and relations for Christmas presents. The days that used to be so long have resolved themselves into an incessant getting up and going to bed again. The

birthday that we thought would never come
comes so often that we think him a bore and
wish he would stay away.

*The
Flight of
Time*

It is not only the years that run. We have taken to running ourselves. A short time ago we reached the golden age of twenty. We had looked forward to it for years, and at last it came. But we thought that when we reached it we should stay there as long as we pleased. It was to be a sort of resting place after our weary climb, a grown-up age that would last indefinitely; when we might stop counting the days and enjoy ourselves. Instead of which it hurried away before we had quite realised that it was there. And before we knew what was happening we looked up and saw thirty passing by and running away as fast as he could go, and forty approaching with rapid strides.

Fifty, sixty, and we are old—actually old! There is not the shadow of a doubt about it. We look in the glass and see grey hair, wrinkles, shrivelled skin, and a bent old body. Ten years flash past again, and another and another ten, and we are dead—as dead as doornails, and all packed away in boxes and tucked neatly under the earth, to make room for the new sets of people that are continually cropping up and filling our places. As we lie a-dying we must think how very short it has been, how much more quickly it has passed away than we thought

possible at the beginning. A day, a week, a month, a year, a lifetime—they have all come to an end at last, and the chain of years that joins the now of seventy years ago to the now of to-day seems quite a short one.

At a charity concert in the East End I once witnessed a meeting between two old men who had not seen each other for fifty years. The concert was over, and various friends of the performers went up on to the platform to collect their belongings. Two elderly gentlemen with grey beards and bald heads engaged in polite conversation. Both had wives and daughters who had contributed to the entertainment, and they were doubtless congratulating each other on the success of the evening. Suddenly they began to shake each other by the hand, to exclaim, and pat each other on the back, while they laughed loudly with a laughter that suggested tears. They had by a mere accident recognised each other as old school chums. They had been at Rugby together, in the same form, companions in everything and fast friends. And then their paths had diverged, and they had gone their separate ways and had lost sight of each other. And now, here they were, shaking hands with each other, and laughing into each other's eyes after fifty years! As one watched them, one involuntarily stripped them of their beards, gave them wigs, straight backs, athletic figures,

and youthful complexions, and then wondered that they should have recognised each other in the grey-haired, bald-headed, benign old gentlemen, with a host of appendages in the way of wives and daughters who played the fiddle. "What are those two old fools chortling about?" asked some one with the insolence of youth. Merely to find themselves grown suddenly old and grey. To find that since they last met, fifty years have whirled away, and that the thing they thought of as a remote possibility when they were boys, has come to pass—they are old men.

We might sometimes fail to remark that we are growing old, so quickly does it come about, if it were not for the rising generation—the new sets of insignificant babies and children that are perpetually hurrying up behind and bidding us hasten on and make room for them. We are continually being shoved out of our places by the rising generation, who seem to rise more rapidly the more we give way to them. If you give them an inch they will take an ell. We may think that if we let them have our place, usurp our privileges, assume more or less our appearance, and behave as if they all belonged to them, just for once, they will be satisfied. But not a bit of it. They have no sooner shoved us out of one place than they are trying to shove us out of the next. "Do get on," they say; "we can't wait all day—you must move

The Flight of Time on and make room for us." Then we feel inclined to turn and slap them. And if we thought it would stop the irritating stampede they are making we should probably do so. But nothing will stop them. There is nothing for it but to smile amiably and move on; watch with equanimity the insignificant children whom a short time ago we saw dangling on their nurse's knee, growing up, marrying each other, and behaving as if they thought themselves of greater importance than us, their elders and betters; or the evolution of that small boy whom the other day we saw playing in the garden in a tunic and knickerbockers, into a distinguished physician, who consults with other infants over our diseases and shakes his head over our serious complications.

I console myself with the thought that my fate will be their fate too—that not even the most insolently youthful can escape it. Only a short little hundred years, and of all the millions now crowding on this earth there will not be one left. Each one of the thousands at this moment hurrying through the London streets, filling the 'buses and trains, and pouring in and out of the houses, will be tucked away under the sod and patted down quite tight, and there will be a completely new set in their places. In our very houses, sitting in our very chairs, and in all probability sleeping in our very beds, will be

a completely new set of people, who will *The* think of us (*us*, if you please, the owners of *Flight of the house!*) as mere indefinite ghosts of the *Time* past, and who will, if the truth be known, have serious doubts as to our ever having existed at all. At that house, where we are to dine this evening, will be a new set of people, being entertained by a new host and hostess. At the *At Home*, where we hope to spend an hour standing and shouting futile remarks, will be a new crowd—in all probability shouting the same remarks. A new House of Commons made up of insignificant babies not yet born. A new King or Queen, and new Ministers; new preachers in all the churches, new congregations in all the pews, new actors and actresses—in short, new everybody.

X

IT was too good to last, the calm, sunny interval in midwinter. Even while we were basking in it we had an uneasy feeling that we should not escape the day of reckoning, but should be called upon to pay up for the taste of premature spring. The day of reckoning has come. Spring that lay smiling in the garden is being tossed and buffeted and chased about by a boisterous gale, receiving such rude treatment at his hands that we cannot but feel it will be many days before it can recover enough to smile at us again. As I sit over the fire I can hear the rowdy fellow blustering round the house, sending roaring gusts down the chimney, and now and then seeming to take the house by the shoulders and give it an impatient shake. And through the windows I can see the trees swaying so violently backward and forward, their limbs tossed now this way, now that, that it seems as if they must break. It is almost as if the wind wished to make up for having left us alone so long, as if he grudged us our halcyon days. "There has been enough of this," he seemed to say. "It is my turn

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now. I have not had my share of fun!" *A*
And off he tears in a wild rush round the *Glimpse*
garden, tossing and ruffling and shaking the *of Spring*
flowers, and tugging up anything he can lay
his hands on, in a fit of boisterous hilarity.

There are vigorous, high-spirited persons
who delight in wind, and who really enjoy
being blown and tossed about by a gale.
Personally, I know nothing more irritating.
A gentle breeze is delightful; but a rude
tempest, such as has raged for the last few
days, that blows one's hair in one's eyes,
whisks one's hat off, and against which one
must struggle might and main to keep one's
equilibrium, I find both trying to the temper
and fatiguing to the body. I have sat by the
roadside with my bicycle, and wept with
impotent rage at my inability to make my
way against a determined wind. Not only
that, but my spirits go down with the baro-
meter in wind. While the gale lasts I am
depressed, gloomy, even suicidal. It is not
to be wondered at, therefore, that I regard
the gale with animosity, and look back with
regret at the sunny warmth we revelled in a
week ago.

I feel, too, that Nature has played us a
practical joke. All through the winter she
has been smiling perfidiously, beguiling poor
little flowers into budding and blossoming
under the belief that it was already spring.
That she has smiled all over the country I

A Glimpse of Spring gather from the murmur of surprise that has found vent in the newspapers at the unusual appearance of flowers that, as a rule, do not show their faces till late spring, or even summer. Now one, now another garden lover has sent in a list of flowers in blossom, which betokened something unusual in the air.

The fact is that they had all fallen victims to Nature's little joke. All believed spring had really arrived, whereas she was still many weeks off. Even in the depths of the winter there seems to have been a feeling abroad among the plants that spring was at hand, so much so that some of them, notably the primroses, thought it not worth while to go to sleep at all, but kept blossoming all through the cold. This was (in my garden at least) the case with plants that had leaves above ground and could feel the soft blandishments of the air.

That the soft influence did not penetrate down to the bulbs one gathers from the fact that they do not show signs of being much before their time, but seem inclined to have their sleep out and appear in their due season. But as far back as a month ago, primroses, polyanthus, and violets had yielded to the persuasion that it was spring, and were blossoming thickly. If a remnant of doubt remained in their minds on the subject, it was swept away by the delightful spring days that have just been driven off by the gale. If they

blossomed thickly before, they now rushed *A Glimpse of Spring* into profusion. Not only the coloured garden primroses, to whom an artificiality of life may have given greater power of adaptation, but the common yellow, began pushing up buds and unfolding them in the sun. Encouraged by the primroses, all sorts of things began to show their noses. The honeysuckle over the porch covered itself with green buds. And perennials not due for another month began pushing through the earth and peeping at the world.

The plants were not the only things that were taken in. Blackbirds, thrushes, finches, and larks, sang gaily all day long, and a fuss and chatter went on in the shrubberies, in which one seemed frequently to catch the words "nests" and "eggs."

We ourselves began to lose faith in the almanac, and to feel that, in spite of his assurance that it was winter, it was a question on which we must use our own judgment. We had only to put our heads out of the window to see, smell, feel and hear spring in the air. And we felt it safer to doubt the almanac than the evidence of our senses. It was impossible not to feel spring in one's veins and thoughts. Like the birds, we set about making plans for the future. Life seemed more full of pleasant possibilities than it had for months, and we felt an encouragement in the air to make the most of them. For

myself, vague thoughts of muslin blouses and linen skirts were wafted through my mind on the sunny breeze, and I felt more packed with good resolutions than I had been at any time of the year, not excepting New Year's Day.

I spent all day in the garden. For it seemed to invite one with an attraction that was irresistible. And of all things in the garden the snowdrops attracted me most. I wondered what they thought of the gay appearance of the garden—whether they had been aware of something unusual in the air, or whether, comfortably asleep in their earthy beds, they had been unconscious of the stir that was going on overhead, and had awakened and pushed through with their usual punctuality to find things not as they were wont to find them.

Frequently it has been their fate to raise their heads from a bed of snow, vying in whiteness with their own purity. Seldom, if ever, has it been their lot to find themselves surrounded by yellow, laughing primroses and violets, whose demeanour partakes of boldness rather than modesty, so eager do they seem to show their faces. Whether it be the novel setting or not, it seems to me that snowdrops have never looked so beautiful as they did in those few sunny days—that the contrast between the green and white has never been so exquisite, their grouping among the shrubs and trees never so dainty. Also they seem to

me, like the rest of the garden, to have drunk *A Glimpse of Spring* deeply of the premature spring, and to share the wide-awakeness and activity of the prim-rose and violets. As a rule, the calm, cold purity of the snowdrops keeps one at a distance. This year they seem to be warm with life, and a flutter of consciousness seems to stir their petals. Again and again I have felt myself drawn out into the shrubbery to watch the snowdrops and admire the delightful little upright clumps round the tree-trunks. And though I have seen them year after year, and have always felt for the first snowdrop a tender sympathy, I have never welcomed them with such affection, nor felt them to be such charming little creatures, as in the few days of premature spring that have just passed away.

The gale brings with it gloomy forebodings of cruel frosts to destroy the blossoms and nip the buds of the too trusting plants, and maim their young life. Recollections of severe frosts at the end of March flit through my brain. As I draw my chair close to the fire and listen to the wind, I seem to detect an icy shrillness in its whistle. There is a look in the out-of-door air that suggest snow and makes me shiver.

XI

On an Island

THE March winds keep me indoors. And as I sit idle over the fire, memories of other years take shape out of the past, shine clear for a moment, fade out, and are lost again. One, that of an island in the sea, on which I once spent a springtime, remains clear and vivid. It seems to invite me to visit it again. And yet I should find my island changed. For in those days I lived in London, so that my visit to the island shines in the past like a jewel set in soot.

There are some who say that if you spend two years of your life in London you will never wish to live anywhere else. The spirit of life at express train speed has a way of getting into our blood, and we go rushing wildly about all day and most of the night, hardly pausing to take breath. Not with the object of getting anywhere. In London, as in the Looking-glass World, it takes all the running an average mortal can manage to remain in the same spot. But the object is of very little importance. It is the rush we so thoroughly enjoy—the being “in the swim” that makes us feel that life anywhere

but in this tumultuous, whirling centre of *On an Island* things can hardly be worth living.

But there comes a time when we begin to weary of frantically flying round, and to long for a quiet spot in the country, with fields and budding hedges, and blue skies with larks soaring in them, and banks thick with primroses, and, above all, with nothing to do but sit and draw in deep breaths of pure fresh air.

It was in such a mood that I fled from the metropolis to a little island in the sea. And to any one suffering from the evil effects of a too rampant civilisation I would recommend that they should do the same. Nothing can offer a greater contrast to a bustling, crowded city than an island in the sea, where you are in the very midst of the elements ; earth, with its grasses beneath your feet, sky over your head, and sea all round you. There are plenty within easy reach, and it does not matter which you choose as long as it is small, so that you never lose sight of the fact that it is an island. For, as the geography books used to tell us, an island is a bit of land surrounded by water ; but if it is so large that the water becomes a matter of faith only, and not of sight, you might just as well be on a continent.

The island I chose was small and rocky, and embedded in the bluest of seas. When I sat on the highest point in the middle, I

*On an
Island*

could almost see the whole island rising like a rock out of the water, which lapped all round it. Here and there, not far off, in the sea, rocks peeped up from beneath the blue, and specks of white sails skimmed along on the surface ; but beyond them, as far as the horizon, there was nothing but sea, cutting us off so completely from the rest of the world that one almost forgot its existence. One felt remote and isolated, and wrapped in an atmosphere of absolute peace.

The feeling of isolation and remoteness that you have on an island is one of its chief charms. But it carries with it a conviction of the insecurity of human life, of the helplessness of man if the elements chose to rise against him. A gale comes rioting along and dashes the sea up over the rocks. A little more and you feel he might pick you up and hurl you into the raging waves as if you were a morsel of seaweed. If the sea chose to rise into a tidal wave, and march along towards your island—an awful habit it is said to have in some parts—it might sweep it bare of every vestige of humanity in the twinkling of an eye. An earthquake might suddenly draw you and your island down into the depths, and the sea close over you smooth and blue, and in a moment you and it cease to exist.

None of these disasters, which, after all, may happen to any island at any time,

happened to mine. But an idle sea-fog that *On an Island* had been careering up and down the Channel amusing itself interfering with the traffic, sat down upon us, and stayed there for three days on end, effectually blotting us out for the time being, as far as the rest of the world was concerned. A smooth, shiny rim of water lapping round us, and beyond, impenetrable mist, and we were as isolated as if we had been on a tiny planet suspended in mid-air. Even the familiar rocks had disappeared, shrouded in opaque white mist. A telegraph wire connected us with one of the larger islands, and we kept up a shouting, sort of "Are-you-there?" conversation through it. But for all practical purposes we might as well have been on the moon. No boats came near us, and none of ours could venture forth. There was nothing to do but to wait, huddled into one large family by our common interest, till the fog chose to move on.

That was the only thing that happened. The rest of the time the sun shone, the sea was smooth and blue, and existence a peaceful monotony. I spent my time wandering about the shore and gazing out at the little pink rocks that studded the blue, at the sea-gulls whirling round them, and at the fishing boats paddling in and out and pulling at their nets. When the tide was full in I sat on the rocks and gazed down through the sparkling green at the stones and waving seaweeds, and

*On an
Island*

longed to be a fish to plunge into the cool sea-water and swim. When it went out I followed it, stepping from rock to rock, and investigating with a stick the little pools that it left behind, full of shrimps, limpets, and pink and green seaweeds.

The inhabitants were chiefly sun-bronzed fishing folk, who wore blue jerseys, and employed themselves making excursions from the rocks in boats to catch fish, or in turning their patches of gardens to account by growing bulbs for the markets on the mainland. There was an atmosphere of thrift and industry about the place, but no feeling of hurry. Everything was done in a leisurely, thorough way, as if there were an abundance of time. They were a pleasant, kindly folk. Living hand-in-glove with the elements seems to have a softening effect on the character, and especially, perhaps, when the element happens to be water. The Swedes who live round lakes, clustering down to the water's edge, and shooting out little fringes of buildings right into the water, are proverbially placid and kind. As soon as you set foot in their country you feel the influence of the softening element. And certainly the island folk had a charm of their own, a spontaneous friendliness that was sympathetic without being intrusive, and a kindly humour that was peculiarly attractive. They were kind to each other, kind to their children, and kind

to animals. I met with one whose kindness *On an Island* extended even to insects. He was a young fellow with a ruddy, sunburnt face, golden brown hair and moustache, and blue eyes. I got him to take me in his boat when he went paddling about after fish. The boat was called "The Busy Bee." I remarked upon the name once, and he said, "'Thereby hangs a tale,' as the saying is. When I was building her a bee came into the shed and made his home there. There was an empty cartridge on a shelf, and he filled it with honey. So I put another, and he filled that. I was there every day building the boat, and after a while the little fellow got to know me as well as if he'd been a dog. When I come into the shed he'd not take a bit o' notice. But if any one else come in he'd fly at them, buzzing in their face, as if he wanted to drive them out. You'd hardly believe how fond I was of the little beggar. And then one day I'd been at an old locker in the corner, full of rubbish and spiders' webs, and left the door open. I went out of the shed for an hour, and when I came back the poor little chap had got killed. He'd caught himself in a spider's web. He might 'a been a child, I missed him so much. And I called the boat 'Busy Bee' after him."

I was in love with the whole island when my stay came to an end. An ineffable content pervaded me. It followed me even to

*On an
Island*

the packet that took me back to England. The sun was shining in the sky as if it were midsummer as we spun away from the pier in the early morning, making eddies of foam on the smooth water. We watched the pier dwindle till our friends with their waving handkerchiefs had shrunk to pygmies, the houses shutting up like telescopes, and the islands running rapidly away till they were distant rocks on the horizon. A bright little breeze gave us a helping hand, and we flew gaily along, leaving a long, white, foaming track behind. We passed the spiky white cliffs of the Needles and glided smoothly up Southampton Water, watching the green panorama which the Isle of Wight unfolded before us, and into the harbour, where steamers lay thick alongside the piers, and after a little backing and fussing of the screw, slipped into our place beside one of the wharves, and our journey was over.

The island is a thing of the past. But even to think of it is to feel soothed in body and soul. The cruel whistle has died out of the March wind tearing round the house. And sunny April is not far off.

XII

“**T**O spin, or not to spin—that was the *Pegtops* question” that agitated the breast of the street urchin during my stay in the island; for it was the pegtop season. Down by the quay the back streets and alleys were full of groups of boys and girls excitedly hurling tops from lengths of string into the middle of the road, and vying with each other as to which would spin longest. The small shops displayed in their windows tops of every kind and degree—objects eagerly coveted by the island urchin. For the time being his world was a world of tops. For him the universe spun in a double sense. To be without a top was to be hopelessly outside the pale of urchin society and to suffer the pangs of heart-burning jealousy.

It was my luck one day to purchase bliss with the modest sum of three-halfpence for two youngsters who were gazing longingly into the top world from the threshold, barred from entrance by the lack of a penny, or to

Pegtops

be accurate, of three farthings—a halfpenny for the top and a farthing for the string. They were flattening their noses, and indeed their whole bodies, against the window-pane of a small shop, and I stopped to see what they were looking at. It was at a box containing tops and string. I watched them choosing the tops of their hearts, pressing their grimy fingers on the window-pane in a way that threatened to make a hole in the glass, and enjoying the delights of imaginary possession with the philosophy of the child, who knows it is nearly as good as possession itself; and when I said "Can you spin a top?" they wheeled round at me with an eager "Yes, m'm." "Well, which colour will you have?" "I'll have a red!" "I'll have a blue!" they shouted simultaneously. "Come along, then," and in we went to the shop. The box was placed before them, the grubby paws hovered for a moment, and then pounced; the necessary twists of string were added, and with a rush they were off to join their fellows. The world of tops was open to them. They no longer stood without on the threshold, gazing in with longing eyes. They were inside, and, as far as tops were concerned, on a footing with the highest. Three-halfpence had opened the gates of paradise for them. I passed them a few minutes later—no longer outcasts, but mingling with a group of top-spinners—and marked

one of them, the more eager of the two, *Pegtops* winding the string round his top with a strenuous frown that showed all his energies collected and sharpened into a keen determination to spin or die. He looked up at me as I passed, and, pausing in his efforts, ran after me across the road—doubtless to put in a plea for more tops in the future, I thought. To my surprise, when he caught me up, he looked up into my face, shouted a heartfelt “Thank you, ma’am!” and was off again. At the vision of his brown, grimy face, glowing with gratitude and the flash of his eager sparkling eyes, I felt myself shrink to a miserable, dull automaton of a woman, with a mind full of sordid concerns—domestic worries and the like. I felt ashamed at the disproportion between the urchin’s radiant gratitude and the paltriness of the gift that had given birth to it—the expenditure of a mere three-halfpence.

I walked on and fell to marvelling at the imagination that can glorify tops and sordid surroundings into a veritable paradise; at the enthusiasm that can express enough of gratitude in two words to make a grimy back alley glow as with warmth and sunshine, and my wretched self shiver at the contrast of my own dull coldness. To be able so to extract the kernel of delight from things common and rough, as to be filled and positively glow with the joy of spinning a top

Pegtops

in a gutter, is to be a king among men. To the top-spinner the alley is not sordid, the top is not clumsy, its colours are not hideous. The delight of spinning has clothed them with a romance and colour that will defy the elements and be proof against the ravages of time.

Who would have thought that the world of tops was so important? Of its mere existence we most of us live in blissful ignorance. And yet there it is, a very real little world, a whirling and twirling and spinning world, full of urchins with hopes, fears, jealousies, and ambitions, all circling round a pegtop that you buy for a halfpenny, and a bit of string that costs a farthing.

What a world of worlds it is, after all! One world within world, and again of world within world! With a top and a bit of string the urchin creates a world for himself; with a brush, some paints, and a canvas, the artist creates another; with a stage and something to dress himself up in, the actor creates another. They are countless—infinite in number and variety. And queer worlds some of them seem to us, as we catch a glimpse, in passing by. The man who stands, day after day at the edge of the pavement selling penny toys, what a queer world must his be. To stand all day long arranging and rearranging, say, Japanese frogs on a tray, drawing the attention of the passers-by to their charms,

using all one's eloquence to persuade them *Pegtops* that a frog is indispensable to their happiness, and that no well-regulated household should be without one, must surely make the world seem like one huge Japanese frog. And to have one's food, drink, lodging, and clothing, one's whole life, in fact, dependent on the number of frogs one can manage to distribute among one's fellow-citizens, must surely raise him to a pinnacle round which the rest of the universe seems to revolve.

Some of us go our ways through life oblivious of all worlds but our own. Others, like Mr. Pepys, are continually running about poking our noses into other people's worlds and exclaiming with surprise at what we see there. But all of us are liable occasionally to have our eyes open to the size and importance of worlds within easy reach of our own, of which we have dwelt in ignorance. An in-artistic person, unfamiliar with the world of paints and canvases, goes to sit for his portrait in a studio. He has plenty of time for reflection, and his reflections will take the form of surprise at the size and importance of the world of paints and canvases — surprise that he has lived so long in ignorance of what must be the familiar everyday facts of the artist's life.

You happen to come across a potato grower — a man who spends all his time and most of his thoughts on the growing of potatoes.

Pegtops

Hitherto potatoes have played so unimportant a part in your world that, had the whole race been swept off the face of the globe, you might easily have failed to remark it. But as you walk through the grounds of the potato grower, through acres and acres of potatoes, and hear him discourse on this variety and that variety, you begin to feel that you have got into a world simply full of potatoes. You find that there are families and families of potatoes with different characteristics and different names ; that volumes upon volumes have been written about them ; that they have pedigrees, relationships, and class distinctions ; that the diseases the poor things are subject to are treated of in enormous folios ; that hundreds and hundreds of men are employed in the mere digging of them up, putting them into sacks, and carrying them about. In short, you go home after your glimpse into the potato world quite ashamed of your ignorance of the important position they occupy, and determined for the future to recognise their claims to consideration—in short, to eat them with greater respect.

After all, we are finite creatures. One world is about as much as we can manage, and it is best to confine our attention to that one as much as possible. For if we realised the importance of everything we should inevitably sink under the burden, or go mad

from overpressure on the brain. It is best for *Pegtops* some people that potatoes should exist only in vegetable-dishes. It is only a light fantastic Mr. Pepys who can go tripping about, peeping into everybody's world and grasping a little of everything without becoming delirious. For my part, after realising the true importance of the potato, I feel that there is a limit to what my brain can stand. I am content to be ignorant.

XIII

*Max's
Diction-
aries*

NEXT to thermometers, Max loves dictionaries. Observation of humanity has led me to the conclusion that both are common weaknesses with man, and that as regards the latter idiosyncrasy, Charles Lamb, when he classes dictionaries as "books which are no books," is by no means representative of his sex.

At one time of my life I thought that for the sake of domestic harmony it was incumbent on me to try and love thermometers and dictionaries. I even went so far as to begin, in the case of thermometers. I took my own temperature every day for a month, but as it never once went beyond normal, and as I knew that if I could not get up an interest in my own temperature it was hopeless to try and be interested in the temperature of the world at large, I gave it up. I made up my mind, indeed, that nothing short of a revolution of my whole nature would suffice to change my attitude towards thermometers from one of indifference tinged with contempt

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to even a warm interest—let alone love—and that I was incapable of bringing about such a *Max's Dictionaries* revolution.

Having failed with thermometers, I thought that it would be useless to attempt dictionaries, and that the utmost I could do was to tolerate their existence in the house. Max's dictionaries (and encyclopædias, which I look upon as a sort of dictionary) occupy a huge bookshelf all to themselves in his room. They are in every language—some of them in languages I don't think he understands, but this appears to make no difference in their attractiveness. Most of them are colossal tomes weighing about a ton, and they nearly all run to several, some to more than twenty, volumes.

Now, I must own to sometimes being obliged to consult a dictionary—to look out the meaning of a French word, or to see how to spell an English one. But it seems to me, that if you must possess a dictionary at all there are two qualifications that are absolutely necessary—that it should be small, and that it should consist of not more than one volume : small enough to rest comfortably on your writing-table or your lap, and to be opened and consulted with one hand ; and in one volume so that there may be no risk of disturbing the flow of your ideas by opening the wrong volume by mistake—a mistake which invariably occurs if there are more volumes

than one. To take a wheelbarrow and get down one of Littré's ponderous volumes every time you want to look out a word when reading a French novel, and after sitting squashed under its weight for some minutes to find that you have got the wrong volume, and must wheel it back and get another, is not only irritating and exhausting, but preposterous. If you want a dictionary at all, you want it in a hurry, and for my part I never wish to see a dictionary larger than that compiled by Mr. Bellows.

If dictionaries were limited in size and number to suit me, I fear that for Max life would have lost one of its chief joys. For I verily believe size and weight and number of volumes appeal to him more even than the intrinsic usefulness of the information they contain. He tells me that there is no more interesting reading than that contained in Littré's Dictionary, the "Encyclopædia Britannica" or the "National Dictionary of Biography." But since I seldom see him reading them I must either suppose that he has read them so often that he knows them by heart, or that he reads them when I am not there. But whether he reads them or not, there is not the smallest doubt in my mind that he holds them in great affection, and likes to have them near him. Only lately he has purchased a revolving bookcase to hold the volumes of the "Encyclopædia Britan-

nica," that he may have it quite close to his *Max's* elbow, as he sits smoking in his arm chair. He *Dictionaries* seems to find it a comfort to have it always in *aries* sight.

Judging by the room they take up, I should have thought Max already possessed every dictionary of any size that exists, and that his cup (as regards dictionaries) was, so to speak, full. But this is by no means the case. His appetite for dictionaries is, I am forced to believe, quite insatiable. As soon as he gets wind of a new dictionary he feels he must have it, and he is not content till he sees it sitting on his bookshelf. Now, one of my minor complaints about dictionaries is that they are always coming out. Indeed, it almost seems as if there must be a large class of persons who spend their lives making dictionaries. Moreover, instead of coming out all at once, and having done with it, they have an objectionable way of creeping out, as it were by inches, volume after volume, which prolongs the agony till it becomes simply exasperating. As soon as one dictionary has arrived at *Z*, another begins with *A*, so that it never ends, but goes on like a perpetual droning of the alphabet.

But my chief objection to dictionaries and encyclopædias is that they are so colossally dull. They are full of information that not only I do not care for, but would rather not have, and that I cannot even conceive of any

one wanting. Not only that, but they never contain any information I do want. Sometimes, when in search of an answer to some question that has suggested itself to my naturally inquiring mind, I have had recourse to an encyclopædia. But I have never found that it contained the desired information. Whether it knew it or not I am not prepared to say, but it preserved a discreet silence on that particular subject. I am inclined to think that this may be owing to the fact that the dictionaries and encyclopædias have been compiled by men, with a view to supplying other men with the sort of information they desire to have. And, as the most superficial observer is aware, the class of things the average man wants to know is of a totally different nature from the class of things the average woman wants to know. Consequently information compiled with a view to satisfying the requirements of the one sex is by no means calculated to meet the requirements of the other.

There is nothing, for instance, that a man likes to know more than the derivation of words. I have heard a party of men discuss the derivation of a word—and a dull word at that—for an hour on end ; during which time they consulted no less than six dictionaries and two encyclopædias, not to speak of Shakespeare and the classics, proving by their diligence and animation that it was a subject of the greatest interest to them all. Per-

sonally I make use of my woman's share of *Max's* words during the course of the year, but as *Diction-* long as they serve my purpose in approximately *aries* expressing my meaning, I take no further interest in them. As for worrying about their antecedents, derivations, or even what becomes of them after I have done with them, it never even occurs to me.

I have yet another grievance in respect of dictionaries and encyclopædias, and in this I must also include atlases. All my life I have been plagued with them. It has been my fate to spend my youth surrounded by them, and to endure perpetually having their dull and unnecessary information thrust upon me. I have often thought that if they had sat quietly on their shelves I should not have conceived such a hatred of them—might even have forgotten their existence. But whenever I asked a harmless question, an encyclopædia, a dictionary, or an atlas was produced and I was made to seek my information in their gloomy pages. Worse still, as often as not I was told to go and get the volume myself!

How often, as I have laboriously lugged Littré's ponderous volumes one after the other across the room, sinking under their colossal weight, have I cursed my careless habit of asking unnecessary questions and vowed to give it up!

XIV

IT was not until I had watched Corvay's cab disappear through the gate on its way to the railway station that I gave up all hope of Max's ever tidying his writing-table. I walked indoors with that feeling of flatness one experiences when something one has looked forward to, has come, and fallen short of one's expectations. It was not that Corvay had fallen short of my expectations. He had more than fulfilled them. It was simply that he had come and gone, and Max's writing-table remained in precisely the same state of chaotic disorder in which it always had been, and in which, I am now reluctantly forced to believe, it always will be.

I had built so much on Corvay's visit. I remembered when his note had come a week ago I felt quite excited. "Now he will *have* to tidy his writing-table," I said to myself. I was sitting over the fire in Max's room when the post came in, and I was roused from the depths of a novel by hearing him say, "A letter from Corvay. He's coming down to see us."

Max liked Corvay, and I could see he was pleased at the prospect of his spending a day or two with us. "It will be very nice to see old Corvay again," he said, as he put the note back into its envelope. And he lay back in his arm chair, puffed at his pipe, gazed into the fire, and mused about old times. Then he turned his head round and looked over his shoulder at his writing-table in the middle of the room. Though I did not take my eyes off my book I knew quite well he was looking at Corvay's ink-bottle. I pretended to be deep in my book, but in reality I was listening almost with suspended breath to what he was thinking about, and wondering if he was going to say anything. When he said, "I suppose I shall have to tidy up that writing-table," I breathed a little sigh of relief and blessed Corvay from the bottom of my heart. "Yes, I suppose you must," I said with assumed indifference, trying to conceal the tumult his words had roused in my breast.

I believe that if I had known what a worry Max's writing-table was going to be to me I should never have married him. It is not too much to say that it poisoned the first few years of my married life. My faith in mankind was utterly destroyed by the number of promises he made to tidy it up "that very day," and the shameless way in which he broke them. My life was made a burden by the number of housemaids that were dismissed

because they "forgot, and dusted it." And for a year I was made miserable by the way Max resented my having committed the awful crime of tidying it up myself once, when he was away. For months after, anything that went wrong in the house was traced back by arguments more ingenious than scrupulous to my having tidied his writing-table. "All I did," as I explained to him over and over again till I was weary, "was to arrange the papers and rubbish in neat piles, putting the big things at the bottom and the little things at the top." "All you did," he would repeat scornfully, "was to turn everything upside down, so that I have never been able to find anything since."

After that I tried to get used to it, or to forget it. But I found either course impossible. It is impossible for a woman of tidy habits to get used to having a perennial dust-heap in the middle of her house. And unless she steadfastly avoids going into the room it is equally impossible to forget it. Then I took to making excuses for Max. And in this I was so far successful that I came to believe that he would have tidied it up if he could. By observing him closely I saw that he frequently wished to tidy it, but that for some unfathomable reason he was unable to begin. On one occasion, when its state was more chaotic than usual he was seized with a sudden attack of contrition. "I really must tidy that table

up," he said. "It is getting too awful." "It *Max's* would not take you half an hour, if you stuck *Writing* at it," I said, trying not to appear too eager. *Table* "Half an hour!" he echoed. "Why, it wouldn't take ten minutes—if I could only begin." "Why not do it now?" I suggested. "Well, I really will do it this afternoon." But the next morning it had not been touched.

Then came Corvay's ink-bottle. It was a late wedding present, and came two years after we were married (for Corvay had been abroad), accompanied by a little note, in which he said, "I send you an ink-bottle, which I hope will help you to keep that writing-table of yours tidy."

He had evidently chosen it on purpose. I never saw an ink-bottle that, so to speak, breathed order and decorum as Corvay's did. It had an air of irreproachable bearing that spoke of descent from a line of ink-bottles that had spent lives of dignity and ease in adorning ancestral library tables. Law, order, and dignified behaviour seemed to emanate from it as soon as it was taken out of its box. You felt that it could not stand so much as a pen out of order. When Max put it down in the midst of the chaotic rubbish-heap he calls his writing-table it seemed positively to gasp. Even Max felt the incongruity. "Yes," he said, "I really must tidy up this writing-table. I'll do it to-morrow."

For six months after the arrival of Corvay's

*Max's
Writing
Table*

ink-bottle I used to hope every day that the sight of it would drive him to tidy up the writing-table. But it didn't. The piles of papers grew higher and higher, and the disorder worse and worse. The corners of the papers that stuck out assumed the brown hue of ancient manuscripts, and were turned up at the edges. You could hardly see the ink-bottle. When you did catch sight of it, it reminded you somehow of an old gentleman who had come down in the world—a person of refined tastes and habits obliged by circumstances to live in squalid surroundings.

I had almost given up all expectation of its ever being tidied when a gleam of hope was vouchsafed me in the prospect of Corvay's visit. Max, I knew, thought something of Corvay's opinion, and I knew he would hate him to see the mournful spectacle his ink-bottle presented, almost buried in the rubbish heap of his writing-table. I could see, too, that for the first time, he was really disturbed in mind about it. During the next few days, indeed, I came upon him several times, standing in front of his writing-table and gazing at it in a perplexed way. On such occasions I went away on tiptoe and *willed* with all my might. I knew enough of mankind to be aware that to speak at such a moment would be fatal.

The day before Corvay was to have come, I went into Max's room, and found him

standing at the table with a look of determination in his face that I had never seen before. He actually had one of the dusty piles in his hand.

“Corvay will be here to-morrow,” he said in a voice of iron. “I am going to tidy this table, *now*, this *instant*.” I believe he would have done it, if at that moment a telegram had not been handed in. It was from Corvay, putting off his visit till one day later. “Then I need not tidy it till to-morrow,” said Max, putting down the dusty pile with a deep sigh of relief.

Corvay came. He stayed three days. If I went into Max’s room when he and Max sat smoking there I avoided looking at the writing-table. Like the beaver I kept carefully looking the opposite way. Max looked the other way, too. So did Corvay. We all three seemed to have made up our minds that we would avoid looking at the writing-table and look the other way.

After Corvay had gone, and it was all over, neither Max nor I mentioned the writing-table for some time. It had grown to be a delicate subject.

Then one evening, when we were sitting over the fire, I ventured to ask Max—

“Do you think Corvay noticed his ink-bottle?”

“I don’t know,” said Max. “If he did he did not mention it. Corvay’s a gentleman.”

ONCE a year, about the time when the crocuses are in bloom, and the daffodil's are beginning to push up through the earth, there appears in the streets of our little town, a man with a barrowful of tortoises. For about a fortnight he wanders slowly through the streets, pausing now and again with his barrow drawn up close to the edge of the pavement, that the passers-by may have a good view of his wares ; making no attempt, however, to draw attention to them, but with an apathy born possibly of long association with tortoises, standing limply in the gutter, watching the stream of humanity as it passes by. At the end of a fortnight, the pile of tortoises having considerably dwindled, the tortoise man disappears as mysteriously as he came.

It is a month now since I was drawn into the number of those who keep up this perennial demand for tortoises. I had passed the barrow dozens of times, merely casting an indifferent eye over it. But on this occasion

my attention was arrested as I passed, by *My Tortoises* the uncomfortable, crowded state of the barrow. The tortoises were piled up one on top of the other, and were waving their heads and legs aimlessly about, as if wondering what had happened, to turn their peaceful world of warm rocks and sunny sky into a hideous, chilly, grey pandemonium, through which they were being eternally wheeled on a barrow. This thought caused me, after I had passed, to look back at them. And as every one knows, if you look back at an itinerant vendor of anything, you are, so to speak, "done for." The tortoise man proved himself not so apathetic as he appeared, by instantly catching my eye, hooking me, as it were, and landing me back at the barrow.

The seething pile of tortoises was arranged in three divisions—little tortoises, middle-sized tortoises, and big tortoises. After a little conversation as to price and habits, I chose one big and two little ones, which, in the course of the day, the man deposited at my front door.

The first thing that I discovered was that the tortoise man's trade was based upon a lie. He deliberately told me that tortoises ate slugs, and for that reason were extremely useful in a garden. Now, a tortoise would as soon eat a slug as you would. He is a vegetarian. He likes garden produce, and especially the young, tender shoots of plants as

*My
Tortoises*

they first appear. Consequently, far from being useful in a garden, he is extremely mischievous. I have this on the authority of all the encyclopædias and natural history books in the house; for I am bound to say that as far as my own observations go, tortoises eat nothing at all.

With the touching proneness to believe everything that is told them, that characterises most women, I spent the first morning after they arrived in looking for slugs for them. I went about the garden lifting big stones and planks of wood, and collecting the little grey, black, or brown slugs that adhered to them, into leaves, and I put a leaf full beneath the nose of each tortoise. The slugs, as is their way when alarmed, made themselves into small, fat balls, and rolled over on their backs. But the tortoises remained unmoved. They kept their heads out, but as far as taking notice of the slugs went, they might have been made of stone.

Thinking they might be embarrassed by my looking at them, I went a little way off and watched from behind a tree. After ten minutes, during which nothing occurred, my patience was exhausted, and I left them alone. Half an hour later I went out again. The tortoises were in precisely the same positions and attitudes as when I left them, but with satisfaction I noticed that the plates were empty. I stooped down to see if they had

left any traces of their meal, when my eyes fell upon—the slugs! No longer short and fat, but long and thin, they were moving off in all directions, with what in a slug, would, I suppose, be deemed wild haste, “making tracks” for the nearest stone, and doubtless thanking their stars for a narrow escape. All my suggestions as to diet were met by the tortoises with the same stolid indifference.

*My
Tortoises*

The fables of my childhood had led me to expect slowness in a tortoise, but what I was not prepared for, was the unutterable apathy these three creatures exhibited about everything. Plunged suddenly from the dull monotony of a street barrow, into the variegated colour and delights of a garden, the least I expected was that they should show that they were conscious of a change—that they should betray an inclination, however faint, to investigate their new surroundings. But they did nothing. They just sat on the grass where I put them, and stared. I kept picking them up and putting them near objects that might be expected to attract their attention—patches of yellow crocuses or clumps of jonquils. But they showed not the faintest interest, made not the slightest attempt at movement. I gave them names—Robert to the big one, and Joe and Ellen to the two little ones—and called them by them, but failed to elicit any response.

Then I introduced the bull-dog and the

*My
Tortoises*

black cat to them, thinking they would assuredly exhibit signs of fear. The bull-dog rushed at them, sniffed them interrogatively, and then apparently considering them harmless and amiable, hurriedly licked their heads all over. On this they so far departed from their rigid demeanour as to withdraw their heads inside their shells and keep them there for several hours.

The black cat, who came upon the scene after this encounter was obviously puzzled. The smell apparently suggested game of some sort, for she investigated them eagerly with her nose. Then, possibly, by way of seeing whether they would "play up" to the character, she gave a little leap, and pouncing at Robert, gave his shell a somewhat affected pat with a curved paw, and realised the truth of the classic observation (of disputed origin) that she might as well have patted the dome of St. Paul's by way of pleasing the Dean and Chapter. The hard, unresponsive shell was apparently a shock. Her feelings underwent an instantaneous reaction, and, (obviously annoyed at having made a fool of herself), with ill-assumed unconcern, she half galloped, half walked away, and as far as my observations go has not so much as glanced at the tortoises since. The episode was interesting to me, in that it was the first time I had seen a cat look really foolish.

It was after this that, in desperation as to

how to deal with such torpor, I consulted the *My encyclopædias* and natural history books. *Tortoises* Besides revolutionising my notions about diet, they gave me this further piece of information, that the tortoise lives to a great age —a hundred years or so. This seemed to throw an entirely new light on his behaviour.

That so small a creature should have so lavish an allowance of time, is an instance of the curious and humorous extravagances Nature sometimes permits herself—as when she made the giraffe with a preposterously long neck, and a very small head at the top; a very large seed pod with one seed, and a very small one with several thousands. But with a life of a hundred or more years to get through, and nothing to do with it but eat and sleep, and, if so disposed, lay an egg or two, why should the tortoise hurry? With such infinite leisure at his disposal he may surely squander a week or so in taking in a new situation without earning the reproach of extravagance, or even laziness.

XVI

THE slowness of my tortoises fascinates me. The thought of infinite time and endless leisure has always had for me a strange attraction. Nothing has a more soothing effect on my somewhat restless imagination than the contemplation of the eternal lethargy of the alligators, lizards, chameleons, and such-like wrinkled creatures one sees at the Zoo ; and I know of no better antidote to the nervous exhaustion brought on by the bustle and hurry of modern civilisation, than to spend an hour or so in the reptile house, absorbing the atmosphere of infinite leisure that pervades it. Time seems as abundant and superfluous as the folds of wrinkled skin most of the creatures are wrapped in ; hurry as remote as the prehistoric ages. It is impossible to rush in the presence of such consummate repose. One feels inclined to sit down for a century or so and let the years roll on. To watch one of the creatures move, is to have a conviction of endless deserts, and the rise and fall of empires. One comes away convinced that whatever

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trains, 'buses, and the whirl of the daily *At the Zoo* routine may persuade us, Time is infinite.

On one occasion I spent a full half-hour watching a chameleon at the Zoo going for a walk. During that time he took precisely four steps. I could not but admire the exquisite deliberation with which he moved forward his funny little legs and arms, pausing between each movement long enough for the torpor of Sahara to enter one's soul.

I have experienced a pleasant sense of eternity, too, while enduring the scrutiny of an aged parrot, who saw me for the first time, and after the manner of his kind, proceeded to "take stock"; not with the rapid glance of a sparrow or canary bird, but with a slow, deliberate stare from beneath a half-dropped blue lid, which lasted a full minute. There was the weight of ages about the dry, judicial humour of his gaze, immeasurable experience about the precision with which he marked my weak spots and, generally speaking, summed me up.

Whether all creatures that bring this extreme deliberation to bear upon the merest details of movement are long-lived I do not know; but until I am informed to the contrary I shall continue to believe that the atmosphere of vastness, both of time and space, that enwraps my friends at the Zoo (every coruscation of whose rock-like exteriors seems hung about with the remoteness of a

Nineveh) is accounted for, in some measure, by a different unit of time from my own. Certainly the movements of a toad would give one the impression, if one knew nothing of him, that time with him was so abundant as to be not worth considering ; while the rapid flitting of a butterfly suggests action compressed, by shortness of time, to its narrowest limits.

Possibly the eyes of creatures, had one the inclination and opportunity to study them, might enlighten one, even more than their movements, on this subject. But our field of observation in this direction does not as a rule extend beyond those animals with whom we are brought into constant contact—in my own case my cats and dogs. There is something chilling in the impersonal gaze of my Persian cat's green eyes. My world is not yours, they seem to say ; you may caress me, but you cannot share my thoughts. Very different is their expression from the sympathetic gleam of my bull-dog's dark-brown orbs.

Of all eyes, the eyes of birds are to me the most fascinating. The eye of a small bird is a small thing, and yet it is capable of an almost infinite variety of expression. Any one who has kept a tame bird—not a caged bird, but a bird who has freedom to fly where he will, and who is without fear of his keeper—must have delighted in the varying expression

of the small, bright eye. At one time of my *At the Zoo* life I had as constant companion for a period of several months, a young foundling sparrow. It was an endless amusement to watch the little creature's eye. At one time it would flash with defiance, at another gleam with impertinence, at another melt with tenderness, at another twist itself into *naïve* curiosity. Happily its existence was too bright and happy for the eyes to express that too familiar expression in the eyes of a bird—terror.

A friend who devotes time and attention to the rearing of poultry, tells me I am sadly wanting in appreciation or understanding of, hens, since I fail to see anything in their eyes but a sort of cold, carping criticism, relieved at times by an indignation that suggests scalding tears. On one occasion when I referred to her favourite hen as "that cross old thing," she retorted that the hen in question was amiability personified, and that it was merely owing to the fact that the corners of her beak turned down rather more than is usual, that the superficial observer judged her to be ill-tempered. After this I spent some time watching the hens, in an honest endeavour to detect something endearing in any of their eyes, but without success. The chill resentment of the eye they turned upon me now and again as I watched, (pausing in their pecking about, with leg up-

lifted, to do so), was certainly not calculated to endear.

In the eye of a duck, on the other hand, there is something humourous, even waggish. One can hardly forbear winking at them. They are amused observers of life — idle loafers ; whereas hens appear to regard life as a serious business, the confronting of which requires circumspection, caution, and suspicion. And though the latter attitude meets, as a rule, with most approval, the former is undoubtedly the most endearing.

It is possibly because they appear to be such amused observers of human beings and domestic life, that we find parrots such congenial companions. They find so much to interest and amuse them in the daily routine that they never give one the impression of chafing at captivity.

I was once highly amused by a "fowl" that I met at a show. He was something of the nature of a Macaw, and was seated on a perch in company with dozens of his own kind and others. I caught his eye, which was set in copious folds of wrinkled blue skin, as I was passing, and was arrested at once. He was obviously much entertained by the show. He looked at me, and I at him. Neither of us said anything aloud, but inside we said a great deal ; and as the popular mystic M. Maeterlinck tells us, it is our silent conversations that are of real importance. If I

had not been prepared to believe this before, *At the*
my meeting with this philosophic fowl would *Zoo*
have convinced me of its truth. The language
of his eyes was not strictly parliamentary.
He began by remarking that it was a "rum
set out," and went on to say that he thought
he had met me before, but could not re-
member where. The rest of his conversation
was too inarticulate for reproduction.

I am bound to say that my tortoises' eyes
have at present no more expression than a
stagnant pond. But then, as I said before,
they have obviously not yet taken in the
situation.

XVII

Pepper-corn

PEPPERCORN'S existence was looked upon as a misfortune from the beginning. Even his mother did not attempt to justify it. There was mute apology in her brown sheep-dog eyes as she looked at her miscellaneous assortment of mongrel puppies, and then at us. Seven of the little mongrels had barely peeped at life before they were dismissed — painlessly extinguished by the humane chemist from the neighbouring town. Two were allowed a fortnight's span of life; but Peppercorn clung to existence for two months.

At first his lease had been fixed at a month. But when the month came to an end we looked at each other and wondered who would have courage to sign the death warrant. "There is no more room for mongrels in the world," said the voice of common sense. "Better put an end to him at once." But the sight of Peppercorn's puppy eyes, brown, with a rim of steel blue merging into milky white, gazing at us, his head interrogatively on one side, as if he

knew what we were talking about, but could *Pepper-* not fathom the motive, was enough to drive *corn* common sense off the premises.

It almost seemed as if Peppercorn, gifted with mystic insight, were aware that an arbitrary fate had limited his span of existence, so defiant was his attitude towards life. "If I am only to live two months," he seemed to say, "I shall do as I please. It is no use trying to order me about, for I sha'n't obey." And he set about at once to show that he had no respect for anything or anybody. When the learned Q.C. with spectacles on his nose, stooped to see what it was that was gnawing the toe of his boot, Peppercorn looked up at him and barked in the most cheeky manner. "Who are you, I should like to know, giving yourself such airs? I've as much right to exist as you, any day!" and he pounced at his trouser and worried it with a fine show of frenzy.

His system, when reprimanded, was to answer back with a sharp little bark, and pursue his evil course with redoubled energy.

"Peppercorn, leave that rug alone!"

"Sha'n't!" snaps Peppercorn, and attacks it with increased vigour.

"Come here this minute, Peppercorn!"

"Don't you speak to me like that!" barks Peppercorn defiantly, and worries it with fury.

The only thing to do was to pick him up

and give him a good shaking. But somehow the shaking always ended in a caress. For curiously enough, the moment Peppercorn felt himself picked up, a change came over his mood. Defiance died out and left him soft and pliable. He offered no resistance. He just hung limp and warm, in whatever position you put him, while a drowsy pensiveness took the place of his aggressive impertinence. There was a dreamy melancholy in his eyes at such times, as if he were pondering over the mystery of existence, and the destiny that allowed him so short a sojourn in the world. He would even show signs of affection—give a little responsive lick with a pink tongue, or a gentle nibble with his small white teeth, in answer to a caress.

There was nothing Peppercorn enjoyed more than a walk round the garden. He would stagger along like a tipsy buccaneer, scenting adventure from afar. One of the first things he discovered was that he was not allowed to go on the flower beds, and he set himself at once to resist the ridiculous restriction. With exasperating indifference to our appeal, he would step over the border and walk about among the plants, his soft, heavy paws making pits in the brown mould wherever he went. He had a curious, wrapt look when thus engaged, as if he were enjoying the sensation of sinking in. The next thing he discovered was that he could "go

one better" than merely walking on the *Pepper-beds*; he could pull up the plants. His first *corn* effort in this direction was purely experimental. He seized a poor little carnation that had only been planted the day before, pulled it up, and shook it. The shriek that greeted this enormity went to his head like wine. He seized another. Then remonstrances, waxing louder, seemed to lash him to a fury. He made a dash at a tuft of grey flannel-like leaves a little way off, and growling in a mock frenzy, seized a mouthful of it, chucked it aside, went for it again, and before he could be caught, the main part of the plant was strewn around in jagged fragments.

Over his first bone Peppercorn gave a charming display of the wild beast. It was the shank-bone of a leg of mutton, with a faint suspicion of meat and a few shreds of sinew clinging to it. As soon as it was given to him he seemed to realise that the first bone is an epoch in the life of a puppy. He walked away with it with an air of importance, as if he felt it was a thing to be dealt with seriously and alone. He chose a position where he had good light and plenty of room, and proceeded to investigate it. Some one came up and asked him if it was nice. But even this amount of interference he could not brook. "Go away, go away!" he murmured, "don't you see I'm busy?"

Pepper-corn

The spirit of teasing prompted the enquirer to put forth a hand as if to take it away, whereupon Peppercorn gave vent to an ominous growl—the savage growl of a wild beast, in miniature. There was something suggestive of the wild beast, too, in the way he planted his large, loose paw on the bone, and tugged with his teeth at a bit of succulent sinew.

Even in his naughtiest mood Peppercorn was engaging. In his soft, pensive mood he was adorable. When, a sudden drowsiness coming over him in the midst of uproariousness, he would subside on to the tail of someone's gown, snuggle into an arm chair, or lie full length and limp on the fur rug, and dream of the bunnies he was never to see, it was difficult to resist picking him up to hug him.

And yet we all felt there was no niche in the world of dogs for such a hopeless little mongrel, and that the sooner Peppercorn was despatched to the realms of nowhere, the better for every one. The difficulty was that no one could find it in his heart to give the order for his execution.

Then one day, just when we were beginning to think we must give up the struggle and let Peppercorn live, he settled the question himself by catching distemper. Curious perversity of human nature ! Once he was ill, and the end we had aimed at in view, we

all strove might and main to keep him alive. *Pepper-*
We nursed him as tenderly as any babe. corn

But Peppercorn defied us to the end.
"It's no use telling me not to die," he said,
and there was a gleam of his old impertinence
in his eye—"because I *will*."

And he did.

XVIII

AS I sit with open windows enjoying the sunshine that pours into the house wherever it can find so much as a cranny, my Persian cat jumps lightly in from the tulip-bed on to the window-sill of the far room. He stands there for a moment, his soft fur inviting the sunshine, and glances back over his shoulder at the garden. He is immovable, but for a slight impatient twitch of the tip of his tail, which suggests that the loud-voiced thrush in the tree outside the window is presuming too much in boasting of his plans for the future. Then he jumps lightly down into the room, and walks in my direction.

I am separated from him by the length of two rooms. As he walks slowly towards me down the middle of the far room, his soft, heavy tread reminds one of his kinship with the tiger. At the threshold of the room in which I am seated at my luncheon, he pauses a moment, and with head raised and tail low. sweeps it with a rapid glance. He is in full sunshine as he stands in the doorway. His long fur, light grey in colour, and marked

with dark stripes ; his cold, pale green eyes, *My Persian* and his stiff, white whiskers, show up well *Persian Cat* against the mottled-red of the Turkey carpet. *Cat* After this momentary survey, satisfied that there are no foes in ambush, he continues his course towards me, leaps lightly on to the corner of the sideboard, and, curling his tail round his front paws, proceeds to watch me as I eat my luncheon, with a curious sort of impersonal scrutiny, which I feel to be not even remotely connected with greed.

It is more than three years since my Persian cat, a fluffy kitten with engaging manners, was plumped into the middle of the house one fine morning by the railway van. "I am sure you must want a cat," said an accompanying note, "now you are in a new house, so I am sending you a Persian kitten."

The Persian kitten stepped out, eyed its new surroundings with *naïve* curiosity for about half a minute, and then, without the least touch of self-consciousness, proceeded, like the proverbial picture-book kitten, to indulge in play. I dangled the bit of string with a seal at the end, off the basket, before its eyes, whereupon it crouched with a little shrugging, settling down movement of its shoulders, and after following the string for a second or two with wide-open green eyes, suddenly darted towards it, patted it rapidly with dainty affectation, galloped lightly away, and, turning, crouched again. It repeated

*My
Persian
Cat*

this several times, the shrugging crouch becoming more ecstatic as it went on, and varying the performance every now and then by standing on its hind legs, seizing the plaything, like a squirrel, in its front paws, and, rolling over on its back, with mimic savagery kicking at it with all its legs.

This, as I said, was three years ago. The animated fluffy kitten has long since grown into a sober cat; the expression of round-eyed surprise and *naïve* curiosity has given way to something more akin to the sleepy solemnity one sees in the eyes of the young tiger at the Zoo, in whose depths the spirit of the jungle seems to brood. And he seldom plays. Pity it is, say some of my friends, that such a fascinating thing as a kitten should grow into so stupid a thing as a cat. And they eye me incredulously when I say that to me he is far more fascinating as a sober cat than he was even as a fluffy kitten.

His attitude towards me is too impersonal to call forth my affection, but I find him a fascinating study. I am continually marvelling at his perfect self-possession, wondering at his absolute independence, admiring the inimitable grace of his movements, or puzzling over the inscrutability of his thoughts and ways.

The keynote of his character is that reserve or restraint that denotes perfect self-command. He never departs from this so far as to lay

stress on anything. Unlike my dog, who *My Persian Cat* weighs so heavily on his personal relationship with me as to make it the point and soul of his domestic career, my cat touches so lightly on it that I am in doubt as to whether it exists. He merely, as it were, sketches a few courtesies, and gives me to understand at every turn that his destiny is not in any way linked with mine.

It is possible to this admirable self-possession that he owes his perfect manners. I have never, even under the most trying circumstances, seen him lose his presence of mind so far as to behave with lack of dignity, or even to show surprise. To the world at large, to the change of circumstances, and to the whirl of the daily phenomena, he presents always the same well-bred, decorous front. They pass over him, as it were, like water over a duck's back, leaving no trace, and consequently have never modified the natural spontaneity and ease of his movements. He is incapable of an awkward gesture or an ungraceful attitude. Whether he sits upright, an effigy of monumental repose, his splendid tail curled round him, and gazes into the fire ; or dozes sphinx-like on the rug, his grey paws lined with black curled up in front of him ; or spread full length a mass of fur on the ground, with head slightly raised, gazes at the switching tip of his own tail, or walks with soft tread in the garden paths in search of

birds, he is always the personification of dignity and grace.

But perhaps his most fascinating aspect is his inscrutability. Whereas my dog identifies himself so wholly with me and mine that even his thoughts seem to be bounded by the garden wall, I cannot watch my Persian cat for five minutes without feeling that he has links with regions far beyond my ken. At times, when, seated on the hearth, he gazes with a far-away look at the fire, his link with the past forces itself upon me. His spirit seems to be roaming in the remote ages—in the ages when he posed as a god, and watched from a pinnacle the downfall of empires.

At other times, when, for instance, I come upon him dashing from the shrubberies, a bird in his mouth, and looking, with flashing eyes and lashing tail, a veritable wild beast, it is his link with the jungle that dominates me. Just as his sharp claws show at times through the black velvet fur, so do these flashes of savagery, called out by suggestions of prey, or by any undue interference with his liberty, pierce through the well-bred repose and decorous demeanour that are his marked characteristics. Sometimes, as he lies in graceful indolence in his favourite arm chair, outwardly as impassive as a fur rug, a gleam of the green eyes and a fierce twitch of the tail will warn me that he is in no mood to be trifled with. Should I, in spite of warning,

persist in stroking him, he gives vent to a low, *My Persian Cat*
internal growl, and his claws contract spasmodically round my hand. If, however, I offer no resistance they are withdrawn after a moment or two (during which I feel that he is enjoying the sense of having me in his power), and the fierce claws of a wild beast become the velvet paws of a Persian cat.

Though he refrains from anything so personal as to attach himself to me, a thread of tenacity seems to link him to my domestic system—a thread that stretches but does not break. By putting in an appearance at certain times, by appropriating certain chairs, sofas, and a corner of the hearthrug, he gives an emphasis to the domestic routine, which seems to mark approval.

It seems to me that my domestic constitution derives a sort of moral support from this approval, and that, were it to be withdrawn, I should feel that I had, so to speak, lost my backbone.

XIX

Bores

WHY is it that my dear, good cousin Richard is such a bore ? I ask myself, as I sit trying to listen to, and simulate interest in his monotonous babble. And by way of keeping myself awake I take to considering critically his remarks, and examining the substance of his communications, to see if by chance there be an intrinsic dulness in the matter. The result is a conclusion that it is not the matter that is at fault ; it is not even the manner of displaying it—for cousin Richard has a glib tongue, and at times a happy turn of phraseology—but that there is something radically wrong with cousin Richard himself, something dull or boring in his nature or character. This leads me to an enumeration and analysis of the various qualities that go to make up his excellent, worthy self. Besides possessing most of the cardinal virtues in excess, he has an abnormal amount of sound common sense, and a high degree of intelligence. Indeed, I have rarely met so intelligent a man as my cousin Richard. That such a combination of endowments should

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necessarily culminate in a bore, I refuse to *Bores* believe, and am convinced that I must seek the answer to my question in something less fundamental and more tangible than either nature or character.

For a good ten minutes I industriously and persistently hunt the bore in cousin Richard—pursue its phantom, now along one blind alley, now along another, till I begin to have a baffled feeling suggestive of a nightmare. And all the time I hunt to the accompaniment of the ceaseless, monotonous sound of cousin Richard's voice. Every now and then I am recalled from the hunt by his asking me whether I do or do not think so. And I smile vacuously, and say I do or I do not, whichever comes first to the tip of my tongue, trusting that he will not press the inquiry. He seldom does. For, as a matter of fact, he cares little whether I do or do not think so—his immediate aim being, not to elicit my opinions, but to relieve himself of as many of his own in a given time as is possible, without concerning himself as to where they go, or how they are received. And now I begin to feel myself on the track of a solution. Cousin Richard's conversation is like the voice you hear in the telephone when you are waiting to be connected: a vague, impersonal voice talking, not to you, but to some one else—talking, as far as you are concerned, to nobody at all. Cousin Richard

Bores

lacks the art, does not, indeed, see the necessity, of connecting himself intellectually with his hearer. His remarks, his conversation generally, instead of being directed to my ear, are shot at random into the surrounding atmosphere, where they diffuse themselves so rapidly—being of an evanescent nature—that I have not time to pick up a single thread. He suffers from a fundamental misconception of the aims and uses of conversation. Conversation is to him not an intellectual intercourse between two or more persons, but a sort of intellectual deflation. He deflates himself of his thoughts and opinions, like an indiarubber bicycle tyre, and deludes himself with the idea that he is engaging in conversation.

At one time I spent many weary hours groping, as it were, for the wire, in an endeavour to attach myself mentally to the flow of cousin Richard's conversation. But I have long since given it up as futile. Cousin Richard gave me no help—I was inclined to think, evaded me, as if he preferred to shoot his remarks at random, rather than take the trouble to "switch" himself on. I realised, too, by degrees, that he was quite unconscious that there was anything wrong with his methods ; that so great a pleasure did he take in the mere exercise of talking, that it did not even occur to him that it could be tiresome to any one else.

Of late years I have been content to let him *Bores* chatter on, pursuing my own thoughts, and letting his voice act as a sort of accompaniment, like the barrel organ, or the German band in the street outside.

There are times, however, when the wind is in the east, and I am feeling highly strung, when cousin Richard's chatter produces in me a state of nervous irritation bordering on insanity—when I can with difficulty restrain myself from putting my fingers in my ears, from pitching the sofa cushions, books, the tea-pot, at his head—from *anything* that will cause him to cease his intolerable chatter. Times, too, when to find myself within ear-shot of a conversation, to which I am keenly desirous of listening, and to have to endure cousin Richard's irrelevant and ceaseless tattoo on the drum of my unemployed ear is absolute torture.

My friend Miss Brown belongs to another class of bore—the conscious bore. She is painfully conscious that she is not in touch with her hearer, and is for ever making laborious, clumsy efforts to switch herself on. Whether it is that there is some fundamental incompatibility between Miss Brown's mind and mine, or whether it is merely due to clumsiness on the part of Miss Brown or of me, we have never yet succeeded in connecting our two minds. We shoot remarks at each other, hoping they may hit the bull's-eye—

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merely to hear them echo on a far-away brick wall. The result is that after half an hour spent in the company of Miss Brown, I find myself suffering from all the symptoms of acute boredom. My eyes are sunk in my head ; the skin of my face is tight ; the muscles of my cheeks are stiff, and on the top of my head is a sensation which was described to me the other day, by one who frequently suffered from it, as "paleness of the brain."

Candour bids me confess that it has sometimes occurred to me that, while sharing the incompatibility of mind, the clumsiness in trying to establish connection may be mine, rather than Miss Brown's ; that, in short, I may be the bore, and Miss Brown the chief sufferer. An uneasy feeling that this may be the case has once or twice lately come over me, on seeing from the fixed expression, the muscular rigidity, the pallid hue of Miss Brown's face that she is suffering from the same symptoms of acute boredom that are at the moment torturing me.

Who shall dare to say that he is not a bore to some one ? Who will even venture to doubt that the greatest bore they know may not, given the occasion and the listeners, delight every one with the brilliancy and interest of his conversation ?

I have never, however, heard a dissentient voice in the universal opinion that my cousin

Blanche is the very reverse of a bore. Under *Bores* no circumstances, and in no company, can one conceive of her being anything but charming and interesting. She seems to possess a delicate dexterity of intellect, a quickness of mental manipulation one might almost call it, that enables her to be in touch with every one. Her most trivial remark "goes home" with such precision that it awakens an immediate response. It stirs one's interest more deeply to hear cousin Blanche remark it is a fine day, than to hear my cousin Richard relate in detail the story of his last proposal and rejection. And this is not in any way due to mere personal liking for Blanche, but entirely to the fact that her most trivial observation is aimed straight at the interest of her listener, and so accurately that it never fails to hit the mark. Cousin Blanche, I have been told, and I can well believe it, shines most in *tête-à-tête*. But I have seen her in a room full of people engaged in general conversation, and have noticed that she is always listened to—that she never bores. I have seen her shoot a remark like a rocket into the midst of a mixed assembly, which (like a rocket) would suddenly burst into innumerable golden balls, each of which went straight to the heart of a listener.

Sometimes I have experienced, after a conversation with cousin Blanche, a sort of brain

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exhaustion, as if I had indulged in severe mental exercise. At such times I have felt there is something to be said for my cousin Richard's aimless babbling. At least it makes no demand.

XX

IT is a reproach sometimes cast at women *Pet Econo-
mies* that they love small economies ; that they even carry this love to the length of stinginess, and make a habit of underpaying cabmen, and withholding well-earned "tips." Without going so far as to admire a niggardly spirit, I confess that I regard a love of small economies with more toleration than the obverse quality—that of a lavish generosity with a view to increasing one's importance in the eyes of those who know and care nothing about one, frequently at the expense of those who do—and which is, I am inclined to believe, more characteristic of men than of women.

Whether it be the result of nature or training, is a question which, like all those about the intellectual and moral differences between men and women, the next century may be in a better position to answer ; but it has been observed that boys and young men suffer from a super-sensitiveness to the opinion of others, a desire to be thought well of, an excessive vanity, that girls and young women are, comparatively speaking, free from. A

young man's extravagance frequently arises not so much from self-indulgence as from this uncontrollable desire to appear to advantage in the eyes of the world. He cannot resist playing the part of the fine, generous gentleman, even when his sole spectator consists of the cabman or the railway porter.

But apart from this peculiarity, man has a tendency to a "wholesale" attitude towards life, which is incompatible with a love of small economies. Woman is essentially retail. She likes to buy things in twos and threes rather than by the gross, and the trifles of domestic and social life, though they may frequently be her "un-doing," are also her chief interest and delight.

Of pet economies I own to two—bits of string and half sheets of note-paper. I regard them as redeeming points in a character otherwise inclined to extravagance, laziness, and untidiness. It is a consolation, when deplored my shortcomings, to reflect that it is pain to me to be obliged, on account of an obstinate knot, to cut a good piece of string, and grief to find that I have inadvertently torn and thrown in the waste-paper basket an unused sheet of note-paper.

The acquisition of a bit of string or a half sheet of note-paper gives me, in fact, acute satisfaction. As, after triumphing over the knots, I wind the string round my three middle fingers, and ending with the few twists

round the waist which make it into a bow, *Pet*
put it into my string drawer, with innumer- *Econo-*
able other little bows of string ; and as, after *mies*
smoothing the back of the note-paper to a
sharp edge, I carefully tear off the clean sheet,
and relegate it to the already large pile of half
sheets that occupy another drawer, I feel that
moments like these should not be overlooked
when considering the serious question “ Is life
worth living ? ”

I must acquit myself of miserliness by adding that once the moment of acquisition is past, I take very little interest in either the string or the paper, and have not the least disposition to hoard them. In fact, no sooner have I amassed them than I become eager to distribute them in directions where their useful qualities may find scope. Nothing pleases me more than to be asked for a piece of string or half a sheet of paper. And I feel a glow of satisfaction when one of my savings is called upon to supply a felt want. I can give away a whole handful of bows of string, including my best and longest, without a moment's regret, provided that they are to fulfil some useful purpose ; and if the cook do but hint that she is in want of paper on which to write her orders to the grocer, I hasten joyfully to place a quire from my store at her disposal.

Though my own pet economies appear to me reasonable, not to say laudable, I have not

the same sympathy for those of other people. In fact, as often as not, I utterly fail to look upon them in any other light than as absurd and tiresome fads.

My Aunt Phœbe's pet economies are matches, candles, and stamps. Now there is this great difference between her pet economies and mine: that whereas I rescue the bits of string and half sheets of paper from a perfectly useless destruction, and put them in the way of becoming items of importance in domestic economy, my Aunt Phœbe does but withhold the matches, candles, and stamps from performing the duties which are the aim and object of their existence, and which if they are to justify that existence they must ultimately accomplish. Moreover, while my pet economies can hurt no one, Aunt Phœbe's are both a trouble to herself and a worry to other people. To see Aunt Phœbe try to light six candles with one match, and burn her fingers over the sixth, is both irritating to you and painful to her. And to feel that you have unwittingly distressed her by carelessly striking three matches under her very nose, to light a single candle, is not only depressing, but demoralising. To perform her toilet and go to bed in a large room lighted by one small candle cannot but be uncomfortable for Aunt Phœbe. And it is no less a fact that her habit of blowing out the candle they had just that moment been at pains to light for them-

1
selves, because she thought "they had done *Pet*
with it" is annoying to others.

The objections to economising stamps are even more obvious than those to economising matches and candles, and this *pet* economy frequently leads Aunt Phœbe into committing the greatest extravagances. Rather than put three penny stamps on a foreign letter, I have known her delay a letter of importance and thereby cause great inconvenience. Or, more monstrous still, send the garden boy, whose time is worth fourpence an hour, in quest of a twopenny-halfpenny stamp to the village some three miles off, an undertaking that will occupy him two hours at the very least.

I must do Aunt Phœbe the justice to state that niggardliness has no part in her composition. Her *pet* economies are mere fads, mere eccentric developments of an extremely generous nature. She will give away fifty pounds on an impulse, with a scratch of the pen, and think no more about it ; she will forget the loss of a hundred even, in the much more overpowering loss of the "box of matches from behind the almanac on the dining-room chimney-piece."

I confess I do not understand the match and candle economy. I am capable of burning both with a free hand, and without suffering any qualms of conscience. But I believe both are common enough among my sex. The tendency to make spills which

many ladies suffer from is the outcome of the one ; and the constant warfare between women and hotel-keepers on the subject of candles, the consequence of the other. I believe there is nothing that the average woman finds more irritating in her travels than the charge for candles which so often finds a place in the bill. And I can quite understand that to a woman who has by dint of economy made one candle last a whole week, to be charged for six whole ones every night, must be exasperating. A friend tells me that she has paid one pound a week more for her rooms abroad rather than take cheaper and better rooms which happened to be saddled with a charge of fifty centimes a night for candles. She felt the position was absurd. But she simply could not bring herself to submit to that abominable fifty centimes for candles that it would be against her nature to burn, and against her principles to steal.

My friend Mr. Brown tells me that it is women's love of economy, or love of a bargain rather, that makes them flock to lectures. He says that those lectures at the Universities which are free, or demand but a small fee, are always crowded with ladies—that nine-tenths of them do not care for the lecture, are indeed greatly bored by it ; but that they simply cannot bear the thought that so much gratuitous information is to be had for the asking, without making an effort to acquire some of

it. Therefore they hasten with note-books *Per*
to collect dates and facts—dates and facts in *Econo-*
all probability as useless and irrelevant to their *mies*
existence as are the yards of lace they bought
for sixpence three-farthings the other day,
from precisely the same motive, at Messrs.
Blank and Blank's winter sale.

XXI

WHEN Aunt Phœbe, having ascertained that I am to pass through London on my journey northward, assumes a thoughtful air I begin to feel uneasy. I know she is wondering if there is anything she wants. For Aunt Phœbe considers it a lost opportunity if any of her numerous nephews and nieces are allowed to leave her hospitable roof for the metropolis without being given some small commission to execute—the purchase of a packet of pins, it may be, or a piece of tape, or at least a letter to post.

As I am cursed with a memory which, my friends tell me, resembles a sieve, I have suffered much from Aunt Phœbe's commissions, which are so small that they invariably drop through. If she would ask me to buy her a grand piano or an elephant on my way through London, I should, I feel sure, have not the smallest difficulty in remembering it. But as her commissions are rarely of greater size or importance than a packet of pins, I invariably forget them.

Aunt Phœbe shares with many people the mistaken notion that things are difficult or

easy to remember according to their size ; *Aunt Phœbe's Letter* that as small things are easier to carry than big things, so are they easier to remember. That one should forget to buy her a grand piano she would think excusable enough, but that one should forget to buy so small and insignificant a thing as a packet of pins, arouses her indignant contempt. I blush to think of the subterfuges I have stooped to, in order to escape Aunt Phœbe's withering sarcasm, when obliged to admit that I had "forgotten all about it." I have purchased the tape at the village shop the day after my arrival, and passed it off as bought in London. I have telegraphed up to town for a sixpenny bottle of glycerine, and, lying in wait for the postman, have divested the bottle of its wrapping and produced it naked, as if from my trunk. In fact, Aunt Phœbe's commissions and the deceptions I was led into practising to avoid her contempt, at one time bade fair to undermine my naturally truthful disposition.

So when I saw my aunt begin to cast round in her mind for a commission for me my heart sank. It was no relief to me to see her give up the quest for a commission, and, going to her writing-table, begin hurriedly to write a letter, for I knew I was going to be given a letter to post. If there is one thing worse than being given a small commission to execute, it is to be given a letter to post. I knew this from bitter experience, and for a

moment was tempted to beg her to spare me and send it by the ordinary postman. I resisted the temptation to behave with such ungraciousness, however, and, forcing a smile, met her request with affected cheerfulness, and assured her that I would post it as soon as I reached London. "Don't put it in your pocket, or you are sure to forget it!" said Aunt Phœbe as my cab drove off.

Now, there is no more awkward thing to carry in one's hand than a letter. There is nothing to hold it by ; no handle, no knob of any kind. You cannot sling it over your wrist or hang it from a finger. Though so small a thing it takes a whole, unoccupied hand. As it is a smooth, slippery thing, it has to be held tight or it will continually escape one's hold ; and being of a crushable substance, and white, it must be saved from knocks and blows, and not dropped in the mud. In fact, to carry a letter to the post with comfort to yourself and safety to the letter requires two hands and undivided attention.

The utmost I could devote to Aunt Phœbe's letter was half a hand, for I was already equipped with a handbag, an umbrella, and a brown-paper parcel. I knew that it would be fatal to put it in my pocket. There was nothing for it but to cling to it with half a hand. I occupied myself on my way to the station experimenting as to the most con-

venient way of holding it, and finally decided to place it on the brown-paper parcel and hold it firmly there with my thumb. In this position it was at once conspicuous and handy, and so far easy to hold that I only dropped it three times—once when I was taking my ticket, once while I was buying a newspaper at the bookstall, and once while superintending the labelling of my luggage. On the last occasion a porter picked it up, and asked if he should post it for me in the box outside the station. I felt strongly tempted to yield to the suggestion and get rid of it, but a sudden vision of Aunt Phœbe caused me to dismiss it. No ; I would post it in London as I had promised.

Once safely established in a railway carriage, it may be supposed that my difficulties were at an end. Not at all. They were but beginning. The capacities of a letter for making itself a nuisance in a railway carriage are simply unlimited. It is impossible to read a newspaper with comfort while holding a letter. I felt I must dispose of it somehow. I put it on the vacant seat beside me. But by mistake I put it right side up, and I was worried by all the other occupants of the carriage craning their necks and straining their eyes to read its address. Just as I was making up my mind to seize it and turn it with the address down, a large passenger got in and sat down upon it. This was a relief,

*Aunt
Phœbe's
Letter*

so I let her sit on it for some time without saying anything. Then I began to feel that if I let it remain out of sight I should inevitably forget it, so I asked her if she would move and let me get it. It was some time before I could make her understand what I wanted. She realised at last that I wanted her to get up, and did so, in a reluctant, somewhat sulky manner, and I took the letter and put it on my lap. Every five minutes (on an average) it slipped off my lap on to the floor, and I was obliged to dive after it, and sometimes fish it out from under the seat. Occasionally the passenger opposite dived for it too, and we bumped our heads severely. After half an hour of this, I took it with a sigh and put it in the rack opposite, where I hoped it would stay quiet and let me have some peace. As luck would have it, the train, which had stopped but seldom before, took to stopping at every station, and at each station passengers got in with bundles which they desired to place in the very spot where I had put my letter. They either glared resentfully at it, and asked if I would mind moving it, or else, saying "Somebody has forgotten a letter," rushed with it to the window and tried to give it to a porter to post. Wearyed out with rescuing it, apologising for it, and explaining it, I at last seized it again and held it firmly in my hand for the rest of the journey.

We reached London at last, and I sighed a *Aunt Phœbe's Letter* sigh of deep relief. I put the letter on the brown-paper parcel again, clutched them both firmly in my hand, and jumped out of the train. I followed a porter to the luggage-van, watched him dive in among trunks and begin flinging them out on to the platform, pointed out my own, saw him shoulder them, and, running after him, was just in time to see him hand them up to a cabman and open the door of a four-wheeler for me. "Where's the nearest letter-box?" I panted. "Over the bridge—No. 4—under the archway and third door to the right," he said. My luggage was on the cab, and he stood holding the door. There was a look of command in his eye. I got in. It was feeble, but I was inside, the door was shut before I realised what had happened.

I have no doubt I should have posted it at Euston if I had not met the Browns just as I was getting out of my cab. The surprise and pleasure of meeting them all made me forget everything. Till I found myself established in a corner of their engaged carriage, and the train about to start, I did not give the letter a thought. Then I held it up in dismay. "Never mind," they cried, "you can post it at the other end. Put it in your pocket."

I felt the odds were too great. I gave in and put it in my pocket. I discovered it a

Aunt Phœbe's Letter week later—a poor, battered, dirty-looking envelope. As I deposited it in the letter-bowl in the hall I could not help giving it a vicious shake.

XXII

I REGARD it as my misfortune rather than *Games* my fault that I am not good at games.

I believe I was born with a constitutional incapacity for excelling at any kind of game. I am an indifferent croquet player, a wretched Badminton player, a poor lawn-tennis player, and a feeble and uncertain golfer. But I excel even myself in stupidity at those so-called "parlour games" which require the exercise of mental skill, and particularly at those intellectual games that are played with a pencil and a bit of paper—such as "Consequences," "Telegrams," Poetry-games, and the variety of games that require skill in drawing.

Consequently, I do not care for games. Indeed, I may say that my attitude towards games is one of mere toleration for outdoor games such as those that I have mentioned, and detestation of those which I have alluded to as parlour games.

My reason for preferring the former is that in all outdoor games there are compensations even for the defeated. Fresh air, sunshine, and open sky are refreshing things in them-

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selves, and apart from this and from the ultimate aim of winning, there is pleasure to be had in the mere playing of most outdoor games. In croquet there is the pleasurable exercise of driving one's ball at a mark over the smooth green sward ; in lawn-tennis there is the agreeable circulation of one's blood caused by running and jumping about ; in Badminton the boom of the shuttlecock on the parchment is distinctly satisfactory, and to wander from point to point over sandy, grassy links with one's own thoughts for companions is always delightful.

Indoor, or parlour games of the intellectual class, offer no such compensations to the defeated.

But what makes me hold them in peculiar abhorrence is that they make me appear a greater fool than I really am. And regardless of the fact that I lay myself open to the retort "Impossible !" I assert that I would far rather be a greater fool than I look, than look a greater fool than I am. Nothing is so demoralising as to look a greater fool than you are ; nothing has a greater tendency to justify the reproach than to have such undeserved folly thrust upon you.

That people, and sensible people too, are apt to judge of intellectual ability by proficiency in parlour games is a fact, the truth of which I have only too often been made sadly aware. That no more unjust manner

of judging exists, I have only to compare *Games* myself with my cousin Jane to feel convinced. My cousin Jane is a hard-headed, matter-of-fact, practical individual, with a mind of a most commonplace type, devoid of imagination, and which no ray of inspiration has ever for a moment illuminated. Without vanity, and without laying claim to anything above the average in the way of wits, I may say that in quality of intellect I am worth my cousin Jane many times over. I have sounded and probed her intellect time out of mind, and have found it to be of thoroughly common metal throughout—without a thread of gold, or a gleam of a precious stone. And yet when Jane and I play games together, only one conclusion is possible to the superficial observer, and that is that Jane is a clever woman and I a fool. The mere sight of a pencil and paper seems to call all Jane's intellectual faculties to the front. They muster round her in full force, and even seem for the time being to assume a sort of superficial brilliancy. The exact opposite is the case with me. No sooner is an intellectual game proposed, than my faculties turn tail. They go off into remote corners of my brain and hide, leaving me to acquit myself as best I can without them. My courage follows suit and oozes out of the tips of my fingers, reducing me to a state of trembling nervousness. The result is that while Jane is the

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admiration of every one for her ready wit and prompt appositeness, I am an object of pity on account of my weakness and stupidity.

I confess I have often been surprised, and have even had a grudging admiration dragged from me at the ease with which Jane will indite telegrams from incongruous persons on irrelevant subjects, invent preposterous situations and remarks in "Consequences," and reel off rhymes bringing in ridiculous words. For myself, no sooner is the pencil and paper put into my hand than I am in purgatory. What moments of misery I have endured while racking my brain to think of some original comment for the world to make on the unknown event of a "consequence," my intellect absolutely refusing to suggest anything but the feeble, oft-repeated, not to say vulgar, remark, "Well, I never!"

It is one of the little ironies of my life that while detesting games as I do, and on what must appear to all as reasonable grounds, I have all my life been pursued by them. Wherever I go I am pounced upon by people armed with pencils and half-sheets of paper, and compelled to play games. Indeed, it almost seems as if there must be an indescribable something about my personality which suggests games. For I have frequently noticed a sort of restlessness caused by my appearance in an assembly, which has presently resulted in a request for pencils and half-sheets of paper,

or worse than all, the inquiry if there be a *Games* chessboard in the house. If there is one game that I abhor more than another, it is chess. How often have I, when asked if I knew the moves, regretted my inability to tell a lie! People seem to delight in playing chess with me, as far as I can see, for the very poor reason that they are sure of an easy victory. The strange thing is that I can never persuade any of my friends that I truly and really detest the game. They persist in considering it a mild sort of pleasantry on my part to inveigh against it, and will have it, in spite of my protestations, that I thoroughly relish my defeat.

To say that, added to the constitutional inability I have mentioned, which prevents my seeing more than one move ahead, I suffer from an abject terror, suggestive of the worst form of nightmare, from the moment I have moved the first Pawn, will give a faint idea of what I suffer during the game. Each piece belonging to my adversary seems to me a fiend ready to pounce upon me and devour me if I do but wink. How I loathe my adversary's Knight, with his devious ways and sinister eye, his relentless Bishop that pounces on me from a corner, his overwhelming Queen that comes tramping down upon me with checkmate under her arm.

A crown is put upon the horrors of the game by the fact that I find it impossible to

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bear defeat with equanimity. I know of nothing so trying to the temper as to be beaten at chess. Not only does the odious game rouse all my wild passions—hatred, malice, and the like—to hideous activity, but when it is all over and done with, when “checkmate” may be supposed to have put an end to my sufferings, I find it a physical impossibility to smile; to raise even the sickly semblance of a smile. I lie awake at night, long after the game is over, impotently planning vengeance. And even my dreams are peopled with fiendish Knights, awful Bishops, and giant Queens.

When my cousin Jane after ruthlessly checkmating me and taking my Queen into the bargain, remarks complacently, as she eyes the board, “That was a very pretty mate,” not only do I find it impossible to smile, but I feel myself turn pale with passion.

XXIII

JACK is nine years old. He has thick *Jack*
brown hair, brown eyes, and a charm-*and the*
ing frankness of manner, kept in check *"Con-*
by that delicacy of perception we call tact. *kers"*
Jack knows no fear. He has the rare
courage to be himself. Consequently, he
is never awkward or embarrassed, but has
the unconscious ease of manner of "one of
Nature's gentlemen." I have seen him in
various circumstances, and have often admired
the ease with which he adapted himself to his
surroundings, so as not to suggest for a
moment the thought that he was out of
place. At no time was this independence
more remarkable than on the occasion of our
first encounter with Jack. Though appear-
ances were against him he did not flinch, but
stood his ground without budging an inch.

It was when the chestnut trees, that run
behind the plum-tree hedge between the field
and the garden, were busy pelting chestnuts
into the field on one side and the garden on
the other, till the flower beds and the paths
were sprinkled with shining mahogany-coloured
balls, that the encounter took place. Now,

chestnuts (“conkers” as they are called in the boy-world) have a peculiar fascination for boys, almost equal to that of postage stamps and birds’ eggs. It seems to amount to a magnetic attraction, for where chestnuts strew the ground there are boys sure to congregate. Beyond picking them up and putting them in their pockets and comparing notes as to how many they possess, I am not aware that they do anything with them, and am inclined to think that mere joy of possession in the case of “conkers” is sufficiently powerful to act as an incentive to collect.

However that may be, the neighbourhood of the row of chestnut trees became on half-holidays and between school hours populous with boys searching the grass for “conkers.” When they had cleared the field they turned their attention to the other side of the hedge. The sight of the paths strewn with spoils was irresistible. They became raiders. They crept through a hole in the hedge, swept up the chestnuts into their pockets, and bolted back again. In their eager hurry the heavy, hob-nailed boots trampled recklessly on the border packed with bulbs for next spring, trod down the carnations, and broke the rose bushes. And then we felt we must interfere.

Max, coming quietly upon them in time to see a miscreant escape through the hole into the field, sprang lightly over the hedge

and caught one of them red-handed. The *Jack* rest fled; but the captive, though Max *and the* released his grasp at once, did not flinch. “*Con-
kers*” He turned a pair of frank brown eyes towards him and explained like a gentleman. He had not been through the hedge, but had confined his quest for “*conkers*” to the field, where he had a perfect right to be. The other boys did not know they were doing any harm getting through, but he would tell them not to do so again. Candour shone in the boy’s face, challenging disbelief in his statement. Conversation ensued. His name was Jack, his age (then) eight. In the end he was invited over the hedge into the garden, and told to take as many chestnuts as he liked and fill the rest of his pockets with walnuts.

After that, Jack took to “dropping in” on half-holidays and between school hours. With a delicacy about presuming on our friendship very characteristic of him, he never “dropped in” at the front gate, but preferred to make his entry by the hedge near the scene of our first encounter, and never without a special invitation. He would appear at the corner of the field and wait till he caught sight of us in the garden. Then raising his cap he would give us a friendly greeting, and respond to our “Come along, Jack!” by getting through a little gap in the hedge.

It is more than a year now since the acquaintance began, and Jack has long since

been an *habitué*. He rarely lets a fortnight pass without paying Max a visit. If he is absent for three weeks we begin to say to each other, “I wonder what has become of Jack! We have not seen him for a long time.” Though Jack’s attitude towards me is friendly and polite, I cannot flatter myself that I am on the same terms of friendship with him that Max is. Considering the difference in age and size between the two, some might ridicule the idea of so characterising the relationship. But if a frank comradeship is characteristic of friendship, then the term was never more aptly applied.

Though Jack has plenty to say, he takes advantage of friendship’s privilege of silence, and when he is not in the mood for talk or feels that Max is not, he will amuse himself with *Punch*, or even with the *Times*—and a quaint little object he looks seated in an arm chair, his whole person concealed behind the open sheets, reading the foreign intelligence. But when the occasion prompts conversation, he imparts information about his school and his pursuits in an engaging manner, the chief charm of which is, perhaps, the confidence that what interests him will interest you.

Like all boys, his interest is in things rather than in people. The “thing” of his fancy varies from time to time, in character, and also in its power to absorb. A new

possession will sometimes last him a fort-night. Indeed, a Waterbury watch that some one gave him for a Christmas present "lasted him as a subject of interest for three weeks. He spent all his spare time winding it up, and was always anxious to compare it carefully with Max's to see how much it had lost or gained. A schoolfellow of his, had broken his watch to pieces in order to see what it was like inside. "But he is such a destructive boy," said Jack, who rather likes a long word. Sometimes he makes a purchase on his own account, and brings it to show to Max. These do not always turn out satisfactory, as in the case of the telescope which he bought for sixpence, on the assurance of the shopman that it would magnify, and then found he could not even see through it. "These shops defraud you," he said on this occasion, with a fine assumption of knowledge of the world.

His latest interest, which bids fair to outlast all the others, is foreign postage stamps. Jack has the fever badly. He is not only an insatiable collector, but also a dealer. He sells stamps to other boys at the rate of sixty a penny. He has a grubby book, in which rows of stamps are stuck in rather badly. And he usually has a few loose in his pocket, on the look-out for an exchange. He frequently brings some of his duplicates to exchange with Max, and a small traffic goes

on, Max keeping the stamps that come on foreign postal wrappers for him.

Jack and the bull-dog Bill, are great allies, though Jack teases him continually, and is always on the look-out for some new surprise—so much so that Bill's face is screwed up into a perpetual note of interrogation : “What is he up to now ?” so to speak, in Jack's presence. As a rule Jack scores. But Bill, who loves a joke, even against himself, always responds vociferously by returning to the charge.

On one occasion, however, the bull-dog distinctly got the better of Jack, to the amusement of the spectators. Jack, casting round for something to tease him with, found, near the little greenhouse, the garden squirt in a watering-can full of water, and discharged it full in Bill's face. Bill fled, but returned with fury to the charge, only to receive another drenching. Then thinking discretion the better part of valour he retired to a safer distance—whence he could watch the filling process and bolt before he was caught. From the end of the little greenhouse runs a dwarf wall which acts as support to a cucumber frame. Bill chose this wall as a shelter, and looking round it watched Jack fill the squirt, and then bolted, with Jack after him, round and round the greenhouse. Then Jack resorted to strategy. He discharged a squirtful at Bill to make him run, but instead of

pursuing him, ran back, filled the squirt, and *Jack and the squirtful as he came rushing round the greenhouse.* Delighted with his success *Jack* proceeded to repeat it. But he had not given Bill credit for as much acuteness as he possessed. The latter started off with the first onslaught, but merely "made" the end of the wall, then stopped, and raising himself with his paws on the wall, looked over and caught *Jack* in the act of refilling the squirt. He waited to see what direction he would take, and when he saw him run, squirt in hand, to the end of the greenhouse to await him, got down, came quietly back the way he had gone, and, sitting down by the frame, watched *Jack's* crouching back with evident amusement for some seconds—till, in fact, *Jack*, wondering what had happened to him, looked round. It would be difficult to say which of them enjoyed the joke most, Bill or *Jack*.

XXIV

I HAVE since heard him described as a Mystic. At the time he seemed to me merely a young man of untidy appearance, with pale face, long hair, nervous hands, a manner that was a mixture of hunger and dreaminess, and the clammy personality of a minor poet. We were a party of women, and he was the only man. When he spoke we listened with a sort of amused curiosity. He talked eagerly, and there was an effort at a common-place colloquialism in his language that contrasted oddly with his personality. It was as if by this means he insisted on his foothold in the world of tangibilities, emphasised the fact that he was in touch with the visible.

He began to talk of visualising—said he wanted to try an experiment, a sort of game, I think he called it. He asked for paper and pencil, and going aside into a corner, drew or wrote something. Then he came back.

“Who will try?” he asked. He swept the company with his eyes and then looked compellingly at me. For a moment something within me resisted; but I shook it aside. “It

is only a game," I said to myself, and I noticed my readiness. *The Mystic*

He took the piece of paper—a small square piece about the size of an envelope—and without letting me see what he had written, put it on my forehead and pressed it there with his hand. The consciousness of his long, thin, pale hand, for the time being, obscured the rest of his personality.

"Shut your eyes," he said. His voice was low and subduing. I shut my eyes, and felt as if I was in church. A curious feeling of meek submission came over me. My will seemed to merge into his.

"Look into space," he said, "and tell me what you see."

I looked into space. A triangle projected itself obviously out of the darkness. I tried to avoid it, to look on either side, or beyond it, but it thrust itself at me so that I could see nothing else. The lines were strongly marked with a double B pencil, and one side bowed out, as if it had been drawn hurriedly by an unpractised hand.

"I see a triangle," I said, at last, feeling as if I was laying bare my soul in a confessional.

He accepted the avowal with an almost imperceptible gesture, that seemed to take a firmer grasp of my mind. "Look into the triangle," he said. "It is filled with colour. What is the colour?"

"Blue," I said, unhesitatingly; for it

seemed to me that I was looking into fathomless blue.

“Now, look deep into the centre of the blue, and you will see it part asunder.” The blue dissolved like a mist.

“What do you see?” he said, before it had quite disappeared.

“I see a white road.”

He hesitated. And then, “Look again,” he said. “Are you sure?” He seemed to lose hold.

“Yes,” I said; for as I looked it became clear like a blurred picture screwed to sharper definition in a photographic camera. “It is a white road. It is so clear that I can count the stones. It runs away from me towards the centre of the picture for about a hundred yards and then dips.”

“And what is there beyond?” The note of command in his voice seemed to give way to one of curiosity.

“An undulating landscape shrouded in blue mist.”

“And above?”

“Sparkling blue sky, with plump white clouds.”

“Now, come back to the road,” he said. “What is there on either side?”

“Green grass,” I said, after a pause. “Short, coarse grass, with weeds growing in it. I can see the blades. And further back on the right there are trees, and over the top

of the trees a church spire pointing sharp into *The
Mystic*
the sky."

It seemed to me that our positions had reversed. Whereas I had begun by looking through his eyes, he now looked through mine.

"Is there anything on the grass to the left of the road?" he asked.

"Something white," I said, vaguely searching as in a dream.

"Look hard," he said.

"A flock of geese!" I cried with excitement, as the glistening white breasts and long, craning necks came into focus.

My material surroundings—the drawing-room in which I sat, and the ladies drinking tea, seemed to have faded away. I was conscious only of the white road, the cloud-flecked sky, the grass, the white geese, and the church spire. All was tiny, as in a sharply defined photograph, but vivid with colour, and transparent as in life. When the Mystic next spoke his voice sounded a long way off, like a voice in a dream.

"Look along the road," he said. "Is there anything on it?"

"A man!" I cried, "a tiny man! He is walking towards me."

"Look at him closely," he said. "What is he like?"

"He carries a bag slung on one side, and walks with a slight halt, as if he had walked

far and was tired. It is a postman ! ” I cried. “ I can see his cap and the red cord on his clothes, and his bag is swelled out with letters.”

“ Now listen,” said the voice of the Mystic. “ Do you hear anything ? ”

Gradually I became aware of sound in the picture—sound so diffused that I seemed to feel it rather than hear it. But no particular sound appealed directly to my ear.

“ There are sounds,” I said, “ but I cannot hear them.”

“ Listen intently.”

I suspended my breath and listened. Suddenly a tiny far-away note detached itself from the pulse of sound.

“ It is a lark,” I cried, “ carolling in the sky ; and there, I see him, just over the postman’s head ! ”

I let my breath go. The excitement of putting my ear on the sound after vaguely groping, sent the blood rushing through my veins.

“ Do you hear nothing more ? ” said the Mystic.

Other sounds detached themselves and took shape.

“ The geese ! ” I said. “ They are hissing and screaming, as the postman’s step taps along the white road.”

“ Nothing else ? ” he asked. His voice seemed to have a compelling effect on my hearing. As he spoke the church clock

struck. The sounds fell gently on the air *The Mystic* with a distant melancholy. One, two, three, four it went, and died away in imperceptible vibrations.

The hand was withdrawn from my brow, and I opened my eyes. The sudden change, and the effort rapidly to readjust my vision made me feel bewildered. The London drawing-room full of ladies in silks and muslins looked large and coarse, and so near that I felt overwhelmed. The clatter of teacups and feminine voices jarred discordantly.

“Do let me try!” came from all sides, and the *Mystic* went aside again to draw geometrical figures to press on the ladies’ foreheads.

I picked up the piece of paper which he had pressed to mine and looked at it. There was a triangle on it, drawn thickly, as with a double B pencil, and one of the sides bowed out. Inside it was the word “Blue.” I felt bewildered. “How did you do it?” I said, as I gazed at the magic bit of paper.

He began to talk about triangles and circles and emblems and colours. But I could not follow him. Indeed, I did not try. I wanted to be alone, to shut my eyes, and gaze into space at that curiously vivid little picture of sparkling blues and greens and whites, with its clumsy triangle for a frame and the misty blue still clinging to its edges.

After all it was a pretty game.

XXV

Bubbles

I HAD been watching experiments made with soap bubbles and sounds. A soap bubble was stretched on a cylinder, and then some one played the flute to it. This apparently caused the bubble the most exquisite pain. It writhed and shivered and shuddered, became suffused with every colour of the rainbow, and finally turned pale and burst. It seemed to me an odious game; in fact the tortured bubbles haunted me all day. By way of dismissing the unpleasant impression from my mind I thought I would blow some ordinary bubbles, such as I used to blow in my childhood, and waft them off into the air to enjoy themselves. So I armed myself with a clay pipe and some soapy water, and settling myself under a tree in the garden (it was a warm afternoon), began to blow bubbles. I blew dozens and dozens, and tossed them off into the air, and watched them float up amongst the trees. Then I thought I would see how big a bubble I could blow. I blew and blew till I was red in the face. And the bubble grew and grew till it was enormous, and turned every colour

of the rainbow. Then just as I was *Bubbles* wondering how I could contrive to measure it round the waist, it turned pale and burst.

I was gazing vaguely and sadly at the place where it once had been, when I saw a sort of ghost of a bubble rise up and float off, as it were, on its own account. I at once sprang to my feet, threw down my pipe and followed it. It flew along at a great rate, and led me over fields and through hedges for miles, till we came to a cave somewhere near the sea-shore, into which it disappeared. And I followed. I found myself in a shining corridor like a salt-mine, which twisted and turned so much, that I had to hurry along to keep the bubble in sight. It was always disappearing round corners like the White Rabbit. Suddenly I emerged into a dazzling iridescence that nearly blinded me. For a few minutes I was dazed and bewildered, and could not see the bubble I had followed ; but as my eyes grew accustomed to the glitter and brilliancy, I found that I was in a vast place that stretched on all sides further than I could see, and which was full of iridescent bubble-elves with wings like those of a dragon-fly, one pair from their shoulders, and one from their heads, all moving and skipping rapidly about, and sparkling and flashing like opals and diamonds.

The place was absolutely silent. Such an atmosphere suggested birds and grasshoppers,

Bubbles but not a sound was to be heard. As I was wondering at this, I broke the silence with an exclamation.

“ How beautiful ! ” I cried.

At the same moment there was a sound like the explosion of a bomb. It echoed round and round and went off into distant rolls like thunder, and everything was confusion and mist. When the sound died away I found myself standing alone in a vast, dark, underground place. All the iridescent beings and opalescence had disappeared. As I looked hopelessly round wondering what had happened, I saw in the far, far distance, a faint blue line like the distant sea, coming nearer and nearer in glistening waves. As it approached I could see thousands of little bubble-elves skipping and flying along. Soon they had come quite close, and in another minute I was in the midst of the glitter again.

Then an odd thing happened to me. The opalescent atmosphere seemed to penetrate me and fill me with an exhilarating sort of buoyancy. I experienced a series of little thrills which ended in a deliciously ethereal feeling—as if I were made of iridescent champagne—and looking down at myself I found I had turned into an iridescent elf. I was made of film, like a bubble, and dressed in shimmering gauze. From my shoulders grew a pair of wings which involuntarily quivered as I moved, and gave to my

movements a delightful, floating sensation, *Bubbles* something like swimming ; and from my head grew a pair of wing-like ears.

At the same moment all my senses focussed themselves into the most wonderful and exquisite sense of hearing that can be imagined. I seemed to be all hearing, and to be saturated with sounds. I was at once aware that the sounds were those of the earth above, only heard in perfection. Not only did this wonderful sense enable me to hear all the sounds which were being made on the earth above, without the least difficulty or bewilderment, but I could pick out and listen to the faintest and most delicate sound apart from all the others. Then I became aware that as the sounds pulsed through me I was suffused with colour, which deepened and faded and varied as the sounds changed. At one moment I felt the sound dye me a brilliant sapphire blue, which in another moment turned to pale flame colour, then faded away altogether, and then became suddenly deep crimson.

“ Where am I ? ” I exclaimed in wonder. And this time my voice, instead of exploding like a bombshell, was soft and musical.

“ You are in the sound world,” said an elf, “ where all the sounds that are made on the earth come to.”

At the same moment I was aware that the most divinely beautiful music that could be

Bubbles

imagined was going on all round me. I listened till I could bear it no longer, and then I fled, and it seemed to me I spent a century bathing myself in the sounds of nature—the throbbing of the nightingale in groves of trees with the moon shining through them ; the hum of insects in sunshine ; the swishing of water between rushes and sedges. Then I turned my attention to the human voice.

What becomes of the sounds that are over and done with ? I thought, as I listened to the Babel of tongues that was going on. The voice of an elf who was passing answered my thought—

“Over there, where you see those brilliant lights—the sapphire, topaz, and ruby—you will find them all stored away in caves. Every sound that is made, makes an indelible image on the sensitive surface of a sound elf. When the sound elves die, these sound images start asunder, and float to their various caves—sounds of a colour, like birds of a feather, flocking together. There they remain for ever, and any one can listen to them whenever he likes.”

Here was an awful discovery ! All the foolish babbling which we fondly hope is lost for ever in oblivion, stored away in caves, held safe in millions of phonographs, and more indestructible than if it was engraven on adamant ! And then it occurred to me that here was an opportunity not to be lost.

There were many things I should like to inquire into ; and I floated off in the direction of the three great rays of dazzling colour, from which poured volumes of sound that I could feel long before I was near them. I began to wonder in which of the three I should find the particular conversation I wished to investigate. As I wondered, a drowsy, sleepy feeling came over me. I seemed to be swelling. Then I felt a sort of collapse, as if something in me had snapped ; and before I had time to feel any more I found myself on the grass beneath the tree, with the dish of soapsuds beside me. My pipe had somehow fallen into it, and was snapped in two.

XXVI

YESTERDAY I was surprised by a visit from the Mystic. Since the affair of the Blue Triangle I have met him several times, but always in the metropolis. I asked him what he was doing in our part of the world.

“Scrawling a pattern through the Eastern Counties,” he said.

I smiled interrogatively.

“If you come to think of it,” he went on, dropping into a chair, “the earth is scrawled all over by the patterns we human beings describe when we ‘take our walks abroad.’ How, if we are known to some other world, some distant planet, by these hieroglyphics we are perpetually tracing over the face of the globe?”

It is well to make sure of being able to “catch on” before interrupting the Mystic. I looked up inquiringly, but said nothing.

“It is conceivable,” he went on, “that a man’s occupation, his habits, his physique even, might be read in the pattern of his daily life. The swift, purposeful lines the man of business scores in his journey to the city and

back, would be easily distinguished from the *A*
feminine squiggles, twirls, and inextricable *Human*
knots of his wife as she runs about the house *Docu-*
performing her domestic duties——” *ment*

“Or careers round to afternoon teas,” I added.

“Between the dull little straight line of the old lady who emerges once a day from her front door and walks a few yards along the pavement and back; and the vast pattern of the traveller who scrawls curves and loops all over the earth, and draws lines right round the globe, there are patterns of every variety—all more or less characteristic of their makers.

“Take the patterns described day by day by our immediate friends, which are continually intersecting our own. What curious twists and twirls Charles makes as he walks about his farm, returning three times a day for a meal! It is like an ill-shapen trefoil. And our mutual friend A., who darts from her front door like a boomerang——”

“After a preliminary scribble” I interposed. And I imitated the action of an excited pencil about to make a bold curve. “She makes a dash at the front door, darts back for her latchkey, rushes through the door to the pavement, tears back for her umbrella, shoots off again, and flies back for the inevitable postcard——”

“But when once she has started her move-

ment is curiously suggestive of the boomerang. She makes sweeping curves and returns —curves within curves, for she never pauses. Her pattern is like bunches of conventional leaves, quite different from that of F., who makes charmingly leisurely curves — semi-circles caught up at intervals by rosettes——” he hesitated.

“Like the wreaths we decorate the churches with at Christmas,” I said. “What of J., with his tiresome, hesitating, shuffling manner. Surely he makes nothing but smudges. When, after paying you a visit (during which he wanders round the room in a vague, purposeless sort of way) he begins to say goodbye, he seems incapable of going. He stands first on one leg then on the other, moves about uneasily, ‘hums and haws’ till you feel inclined to take him by the shoulders and rush him out of the room. Yes, certainly he makes smudges. W., on the other hand, sits so long and heavily and converses so ponderously, that he makes a positive dent.”

There was a pause. I waited for him to start again.

“Speaking generally,” he said at last, “people of importance score deep lines, while the insignificant merely scratch. The Queen marks the earth with a bold, decisive line wherever she goes. The pattern she made on the day of her Jubilee was cut so deep that it is doubtful whether the earth will ever lose the

mark. Between this and the Continent she *A*
has made many a broad, black line." *Human*

"Some patterns are so important that they *Docu-*
are marked on maps," I said. "The wander-*ment*
ings of St. Paul, for instance"—

"And Nansen's visit to the Pole," said the
Mystic. "Some patterns are magnetic," he
went on, "and draw others towards them.
Others meander on till they themselves are
drawn in. Wherever the magnetic make a
halt, other lines are seen converging"—

"Like the railway lines at Clapham Junc-
tion."

"Popular preachers, orators, lecturers, and
entertainers draw hundreds of lines towards
their points of rest, like—" he paused for
a simile.

"Like a hole smashed in a window by a
stone," I suggested. "And what of our
brilliant young friend Monsieur B., to whose
French lessons we all flock?"

"A pattern characterised by routine,
but—"

"Relieved by the feminine squiggles that
rush towards it every time he pauses," I
laughed.

"It is depressing," he went on, "to think
of the thousands of persons who, going over
precisely the same pattern day after day,
mark the earth with deep, dull grooves, unre-
lieved even by magnetic points. Why should
some be tethered to a perpetual treadmill
while others are free to scour the earth?"

"Some of us," I ventured, "have our pattern somewhat circumscribed by an instinctive desire to make both ends meet."

"True," he assented.

"The most perfect form of pattern is a circle," he went on, with (I thought) uncalled-for dogmatism. "When we go forth for purposes of enjoyment, we like to go one way and come back another, and so describe something approaching to a circle. There is acute satisfaction to be obtained from describing the largest possible circle—that is, a circle round the earth. You may have observed that children and animals, when they are intoxicated with happiness, have a tendency to run round and round."

After a pause he went on dreamily—

"There is talk now and then of signalling to Mars, to tell them we are here. Some geometric figure should, they say, be written in illuminated lines over the surface of the earth—big enough for Mars to see. How do we know that we are not all the time signalling to Mars?—that these hieroglyphics we are so busy scrawling, may not be a vast human document, unfolding day by day, for the benefit of some other planet, the story of our own? Who knows but that, if we had the key, we might read therein the Secret of the Universe?

"The scroll of a single human life, from the unsteady, meandering curves round a

small centre, of the child, as he runs about *A* at play, to the sweeping lines of the man of *Human* mark, and ending in the incoherent, broken *Docu-* splutters of old age, may unfold a tale, have a *ment* significance *somewhere*, undreamt of by its author."

"The Queen, St. Paul, Nansen, and people of importance, then, would be making the capital letters in this vast human document," I said. "And the ordinary men, who are always making long journeys—going to South Africa and back, for instance, the letters with long tails, so to speak, the f's and j's—"

"The men who journey to and fro to their business, the short up and down strokes—"

"And the women who stay at home, the ornamental curves, the squiggles—the dashes, and the notes of exclamation and interrogation."

"Especially the notes of interrogation," said the Mystic dreamily.

"But what of the invalids who stay always in one spot, and the old lady who emerges from her front door to walk backwards and forwards along the pavement?" I cried.

"Are they not performing the important function of dotting the 'i's' and crossing the 't's'?" said the Mystic, with his inscrutable smile.

XXVII

THE drawback of a lazy temperament is that we are seldom allowed the luxury of indulging it. Early training and the world around are persistently at us to be up and doing, when our whole nature is urging us to follow our impulse and do nothing.

For the greater part of the year the voice of conscience and the world, drive me into a restless and useless activity, as worrying, I cannot but feel, to other people, as to myself. But when drowsy summer settles down in the garden, and even Time seems to lag in the sunshine, I give in. I no longer resist my impulse, but sinking into a lazy langour let the hours slip by without even counting them, spending the livelong day in "pottering" in the garden, or lounging beneath the trees with a book in my lap which I do not even attempt to read, but which gives just that suggestion of exertion to my dreamy leisure to make me enjoy it.

There are so many delightful corners in the warm, sun-bathed garden, that at times I find it difficult to choose among them. The

nook near the sundial, clambered over and *Under* nearly hidden by the carmine pillar rose *the* smiles persuasively ; it is sheltered by the *Chestnuts* spreading branch of a fir tree, and a syringa in flower makes a fragrant background of white and green. A little further on, my eyes are caught by the aged willow, whose weeping branches sweep the ground. I draw aside the green curtain, and look in at the hammock slung between the twisted branches. Then my eyes wander to the row of chestnuts that skirt the path, stretching the pale, cool green canopy of their leaves right across it. The foliage is fresher and greener than ever after its prolonged spring drenching ; it is thicker too, and droops lower this year than last. Beneath it runs the path, thickly besprinkled with the fallen pink and white blossoms. And since spring gave way some weeks ago to sunshine and summer, this has been my favourite spot.

It is as irresistible to-day as ever. I drag a garden chair under the trees from where it lies on the sun-baked lawn, and sinking into it, gaze up into a sky of transparent green—cooler, more refreshing than anything in life.

My eyes bathe in it as if it were the sea. I dart in and out among the leaves, following the dark branches as they cross and twist and intersect each other, losing themselves now and again among the foliage to appear again further on. Then resting for a moment on

*Under
the
Chestnuts*

some steady promontory, I dive in among the leaves, and swim, and float, and dive again, letting the pale green sea quivering with sunshine flow right over me, and drown my senses in a delicious daze.

Some little way off down the row, a thicker branch stretches itself across the path, in the fork of which is wedged a mossy nest. Until a week ago I could see from where I sit, the brown head and tail of a bird, brooding in the midst of the summer hum ; in the midst of it, and yet as detached from its noise and fuss by her own brooding, calm among the peaceful trees, as if she were in a world of silence and slumber. To watch her was to have one's soul filled with peace. But now the brown head has gone, and over the edge of the nest I catch sight of large yellow bills, surmounted by a little untidy fluff, bills that every now and then, on the approach of the little brown bird (who, as far as I can see, spends her whole time darting backwards and forwards between the garden and the nest) open wide and make a discordant noise like a bad pair of scissors.

All over the garden this business of filling young bills is going on continuously. A constant chatting and chirping is kept up ; for the birds are much too busy to sing. The world is full of a medley of summer sounds ; the chatter of birds, and the fainter chirp of their young are mingled with the hum of

insects and the distant murmur of humanity *Under
at work in the fields ; while the note of a far-
away cuckoo falls on this humming and
murmuring with a suggestion of warm woods,
sweet new-mown hay, and trickling brooks.*

The birds are not only too busy to sing, they are far too much absorbed by the business in hand to have time to be afraid. As I sit under the chestnuts, they dart in and out, so close to me that I can almost touch them as they pass. A few yards off, where the chestnut leaves almost touch the grass, and the shadow and sunshine meet, I catch sight now and then of the light brown back, the dove-coloured breast, and nodding tail of a nightingale walking about on the grass near the flower border, and making darts at passing insects. And in the shrub close at hand I know she has her nest of young ; I have peeped in cautiously now and then when I have known she was away. It is an untidy little nest of sticks and leaves wedged into a fork in the shrub, about half a yard from the ground, and is at this moment full of yellow bills and fluff that yesterday as I pushed aside the branch to look at them, opened wide and screeched. If I had not actually seen the nightingale feeding them I should have thought them to be young thrushes, for even at this early stage they look larger than the parent bird ; their bills are large and yellow, and their plumage brown and spotted.

*Under
the
Chestnuts*

A cheeky sparrow causes me to jump, by making a sudden dash on to the ground a couple of yards from my feet, and pouncing on a large cockchafer. Quite regardless of my presence he proceeds to peck at it and toss it about, seizing it again every time it makes an attempt to escape, and dealing with it very much in the way a cat deals with a mouse—proving to my private satisfaction at least, that the sparrow is not the vegetarian his enemies would have us believe. And a little further off I can hear a thrush mercilessly banging a snail-shell (with, I presume, a snail inside) on a large stone.

From my green shelter I can see out under the drooping leaves into hot sunshine. On one side I catch the red blaze of deep red poppies; on the other side grass, still green, though the sun beats down upon it. Shrubs make patches of shade on it here and there, and in one of these patches lies the bird's bath—a flat, earthenware pan filled with water, in which it seems to me they bathe all day long, for I rarely pass it by without seeing a fluffy splasher in it. In the hot weather it is my labour and my joy to fill it sometimes as often as six times a day. My labour, because it takes a large can of fresh water from the pump to thoroughly rinse it of the dirty water filled with feathers, that a dozen bathers will leave in it, and to fill it to the

brim with cool, clear water ; my joy, because *Under*
there is nothing more refreshing than to see *the*
a bird indulging in a tub ; and from my seat *Chestnuts*
under the chestnuts I can watch one bird after
another go through the performance from
beginning to end. The dainty alighting on
the edge of the pan ; the few minutes spent
in screwing up courage to plunge, flirting
and toying with the water, making little
feints of plunging in, and fluttering out again
(enjoying what a small friend of mine calls
the "nice shuddery feeling" we ourselves
have so often felt when dawdling on the steps
of the bathing machine, or the brim of the
swimming bath) ; the plunge, and the
delightful splashing of the water with wings
and beak ; the dart of the moist, bedraggled
bather into the bushes, and the final preening
and drying in the sun—who has not watched
it and felt himself refreshed in body and soul
by the sight ?

Only last night a new incentive to labour
was added to this. We had been sitting in
the garden enjoying the warm, night air, and
were on our way to house and bed. As I
passed the birds' bath I stooped to see if it
were full or empty. In the dark I could just
see the gleam of water about half-way up, but
a dark shadow in it at one side, caused me to
pause and look closer. I called to Max for a
match to see what it was. The flare of the
match revealed a large, green frog, sitting in

Under the water up to his neck, and looking so cool,
the so comfortable, so quiet!—a delightfully
Chestnuts composing picture to take to bed with one, to
lull one into pleasant dreams.

XXVIII

SOME people are born to adventure. Whether it is due to a naturally adventurous spirit, or to the great law of luck, I am not prepared to say; but, certainly, Joe has had, compared with the two other tortoises, an adventurous life. I am inclined to think that his more enterprising spirit has something to do with it—that he goes to meet adventure half-way. But it also seems to me that the Fates single him out on occasions when they might just as well take Robert or Ellen.

*Joe's
Adven-
tures*

He had not been five minutes in my possession before I noticed that he had already been in the wars. His upper shell, just near the place where his head comes out, was cracked in a manner (a triangular bit being broken right out) to suggest that he had had a narrow escape of losing his head. I did not at all object to this little disfigurement, for it enabled me at once to distinguish him from Ellen, to whom he is otherwise as like as one pea to another. As for Joe he appeared quite unconscious of it, and even to have forgotten the incident to which it referred. For he showed far less anxiety on all occasions as

to the safety of his head, than either Robert or Ellen.

After about a month of apathy, during which they either lay buried beneath the crocus tufts, with nothing showing but their shells, or sat on the grass with their heads out, gazing with filmy eyes at nothing at all, Joe suddenly woke up. It seemed to occur to him that he had spent enough time taking in the situation, and that he had better pull himself together. I happened to be sitting out of doors when this soul-awakening took place, and observed it with interest, the more so as I had already given the tortoises up as hopeless idiots, all three of them. He turned his head from one side to the other with a jerk that was almost suggestive of spryness, and considered the view. About a yard away was a fine tuft of dandelions in flower. He looked at it, and forthwith proceeded to walk towards it. There was unmistakable purpose in his gait, as seen from behind. When he reached the tuft he paused, and I could see by his jerky movements that he was dealing with it in some way. I moved round quietly to where I could see his head, and observed with great satisfaction that he was voraciously eating the yellow flowers. Why so natural a phenomenon should cause me such acute satisfaction I do not know, unless it was owing to the fact that I had made up my mind that the

tortoises never would eat anything. But certain it is that the proceeding, down to its minutest detail, fascinated me so much that I watched him till he had devoured the whole tuft, and felt as if I myself had been enjoying a most delicious meal. There was something quite refreshing (compared with his late apathy) about the jerky abruptness of his movements, the way he thrust his head forward on one side in order to get a better grasp of the yellow flowers, and the energetic way in which he tugged out great mouthfuls of the yellow petals—something quaint and curious about his wide, flat mouth, and the occasional glimpse I caught of the red cavern of his jaws as he “chawed” and snapped.

*Joe's
Adven-
tures*

Launched upon an active career, Joe proceeded to walk all over the garden, only occasionally retiring to the shelter of the crocus border for a nap. Considering the preternatural slowness of the creature, he contrived to cover a great amount of ground, and was frequently found the length of three acres from his crocus border. As far as my observations went, he confined his attention to flowers that were yellow. He would eat yellow dandelions, yellow buttercups, yellow cowslips, and yellow clover, but I never saw him eat flowers of any other colour, though he sometimes ate green leaves.

Joe had been perambulating for a week, when Robert and Ellen woke up, and began,

though in a more lethargic manner, to walk about and browse. None of them showed any intelligence beyond the minimum required for satisfying their appetites, except on one occasion, when it seemed to me they showed distinct powers of reasoning. It was a sultry day, and I was seated in a chair in a shady corner of the garden with a book. The three tortoises were moving slowly about on the lawn a couple of yards from where I sat, snapping up any "unconsidered trifles" they happened to see in the herbage. Not far from where I sat, ran a road, along which went an intermittent stream of light traffic. A heavy dray, whose approach was heralded by distant rumbling, came rattling along this with a roar suggestive of thunder. The tortoises stopped as if struck by the noise, and then all three with one consent turned and made in unmistakable haste for the nearest flower bed.

There was something inexpressibly comic about the appearance of the three from behind as they strode, their little clumsy hind legs, like tiny elephant legs, with their primeval-looking corrugations, stretching out to their utmost behind, in their effort to reach the flower bed. They did not pause till they were each safely established under the shelter of green leafy plants. And they "lay low" till they were perfectly satisfied that the storm they had anticipated had blown over. Obviously their train of thought had been

as follows : "There's thunder ! In another *Joe's* minute it will pour ! We had better get *Adven-* under shelter as soon as we can !" And if *tures* that is not logic, perhaps some one will kindly tell me what is.

Though an incident in the life of a tortoise, this episode can hardly be called an adventure, and *Joe's* first adventure in my garden (for the affair of the cracked shell is, as far as I am concerned, shrouded in mystery) took place about a week later. I was again lazily lounging in a garden chair, and the three tortoises were again browsing on the lawn. But there were two additional actors, in the shape of my bulldog and the Schipperke. These latter had a bone between them, and were taking turns at it, after the manner of dogs. One gnawed, and the other watched patiently for the moment when the dog in possession had his attention distracted from the bone, when the watcher took possession of it, and the other took the part of watcher. Now, the Schipperke, by dint of much patient gnawing, had arrived at a particularly succulent part of the bone, which was so delicious that he kept it for an unconscionable time—so long, indeed, that the bulldog's patience, which is almost inexhaustible, gave way. What actually took place I am unable to say, since I had arrived at a point in my book as absorbing to me as the bone was to them. But I imagine that the bulldog, calculating that his chance of the

bone was so small as to be hardly worth considering, said to himself, "Well, I must gnaw something!" And casting round hit upon Joe, the nearest approach to a bone in sight.

I was conscious for some minutes of an accompaniment to the passionate love scene I was deep in, of a second gnawing going on a little further off, before I looked up. Then — "They must have found a second bone!" I said to myself and turned to see. The bulldog had got Joe standing on end between his front paws, and was gnawing him like a bone!

I flung down my book with a shriek, and rushed to the rescue. The bulldog dropped Joe and fled. I picked him up (he was too much overcome even to put his head out to see what was going to happen next) and carefully examined his shell. The gnawing had left distinct marks on the upper shell, and on the underneath shell, which is apparently thinner, his teeth had nearly gone through, for there were traces of blood.

I have rarely been so angry with my bulldog. I called him in my sternest voice. He crept towards me along the grass, a prostrate and abject figure. I pulled a carnation prop out of the flower bed, and I administered as severe a "whacking" as I was capable of. Then I addressed him on the hideousness of his conduct, till he, morally speaking, wept.

Then I sent him to Coventry for the rest of *Joe's* the day. I believe he minded this more than *Adventures* either the whacking or the sermon.

And yet he must have considered my view of the situation both unreasonable and perverse. What had he done but discover a useful purpose the stupid creatures might henceforth serve?

XXIX

IT is more than two years now since I first saw the blue peas. They were growing in the garden of a friend, in a low hedge a foot and a half high and about a yard long. The foliage was a darkish green, and it was flecked all over with what looked to me like those small, bright blue butterflies that flutter over the grass in mid-summer, but what were in reality blue blossoms. Now, blue is my favourite colour. Whether it be in the sea, the sky, in the picture of an old saint, in a precious stone, or a flower, it is the colour of all others that I worship. I cannot (few people can, I believe) look at a little blue Alpine gentian unmoved. And these little blue peas fascinated me. Not only on account of their blueness, but also because I seemed to have seen them before, and could not remember where. I might, indeed, have counted it against them that they had no scent. The ordinary pink everlasting pea has always seemed to me an unsympathetic, stiff thing compared with the delicately fragrant sweet pea. But the impression of beauty was so

complete in these blue peas that it did not *Blue Peas* occur to me that anything was wanting. *Peas* Indeed, the contemplation of their delightful colour and poise would have been disturbed by a side attribute such as fragrance. They were small, and in this lay part of their charm. They were graceful. They had none of the lackadaisical, drooping airs of the modern sweet pea, but were alert and vigorous, "poised on tip-toe for a flight," and as clear-cut in the summer air, as delicate shells. And, as I said before, they were blue.

As I stood entranced before them in a sunny corner of a delightful bowery garden, my hostess, who was showing them to me, asked me if I would like some seeds. All amateur gardeners love the interchange of plants and seeds that goes on from garden to garden over the whole country, independent of the traffic of seed merchants. To have the offspring of the charming little plants I was at the moment gazing at, was a totally different thing from ordering a packet of *Lathyrus* something from a seed shop, and I accepted my friend's offer with gratitude.

She proved herself to be one of those rare and delightful creatures who perform what they undertake, and some months after my visit to her garden I received a pill-box containing two irregular shaped speckled peas,

rather like plover's eggs in colour, but rectangular in shape. She apologised for only sending two, saying that she had forgotten to tell the gardener to save them, and that he had made away with the rest.

I chose a warm, sunny corner for them and planted them on a little rocky elevation with an old grey stone wall for them to lean against. Both seeds produced a healthy-branching plant, that put forth many blossoms, and made a little blue-green haze against the wall that I could see from some distance as I approached. They more than justified my memory of them in my friend's garden. Indeed, their fascination seemed to grow. I rarely missed visiting them during the day. And I never looked at them without their arousing all sorts of memories of my childhood—memories in which fairy-tales, picture-books, sunny days in the meadows, and sparkling days at the seaside, chased each other about.

I am bound to say that they did not arouse a like amount of enthusiasm in all my friends. One carping critic went so far as to say they were not blue, and several said they were not a bit like blue butterflies. When, therefore, my friend Mrs. S. went into raptures over them, and stood for a good five minutes gazing fascinated at them, I felt a rush of sympathy, and asked her if she would like some seeds. She jumped at the offer, and

then my troubles began. Thinking it over, *Blue Peas* I am inclined to think that those blue peas were enchanted. The fascination they exercised over me, combined with the impossibility of giving away the seed, leads me to this belief.

When they had gone to seed, I gathered a few of the speckled objects, and remembering my promise to Mrs. S. made up a little paper packet to give to her. I looked for a little box to put them in, that they might go by post without being crushed. But finding none, I determined to give them into her hand next time I met her. For some occult reason I found it as impossible to give those seeds to Mrs. S. as I found it on another occasion to send a postal order to Mrs. Brown.

Whenever Mrs. S. came to see me the blue peas evaded my memory, even if they were actually in the room, under my very nose. If, however, I went to see Mrs. S. I remembered the blue peas at once—and the fact that I had left them at home. For a month or two the little packet labelled "Blue peas for Mrs. S." lay on my writing-table. But the annoyance caused by seeing it on the table when I returned after spending the afternoon with Mrs. S., and the impatient regret, "Why didn't I take them with me?" worried me so much that I took to taking them about in my pocket.

*Blue
Peas*

I carried those blue peas about in my pocket for nine months. And then it being high time to plant them, I gave it up. I undid the packet one morning, took out the little speckled wretches, and making a row of holes with my finger in the flower bed beneath my window, popped one into each, and covered them up.

They came up with alacrity, and in an incredibly short time were besprinkled with blue butterflies that always seemed to be fluttering in at the open window. Mrs. S. paid me a visit when they were at their best. "Oh, there are the blue peas you promised to give me," she said, reproachfully. "You shall have them now," I said, and picked a bunch of the very bluest. She put them in her dress, which was white, and showed them off to perfection. They matched her eyes, which are blue. Then all at once I remembered where I had seen them before: in a charming picture of a young girl by Sir Edward Burne-Jones where everything is blue—blue gown, blue eyes, blue peas.

XXX

IT is probably owing to the fact that we *Young Birds* kept the cats in durance vile all through the early summer that the garden has been fuller of young birds, and the hatching has gone on longer this year than I have ever known it. Even so late as the beginning of August there is hardly a shrub but has a young family perching on its branches, and fluffy balls sit about on the paths, in sublime unconsciousness of the dangers that beset them, opening their beaks wide for food whenever they hear a footstep.

The parent birds are still so busy filling the hungry mouths that they have no time to sing. Indeed, the warbling and carolling that filled the garden earlier in the year seem entirely to have given place to the discordant chirping of young birds clamouring for food. The grass-plots are thronged with thrushes and blackbirds looking for worms, and every large stone in the garden has been converted into an anvil to crack snail-shells on. One impudent thrush has actually chosen the slab of stone at the front door as the scene of this messy operation, and strews it daily with

snail-shells. The most popular anvil in the garden, however, is the flat paving stone at the top of the steps which lead down to the stoke-hole at the back of the greenhouse. Judging by the shells strewn about this stone, thousands must have been sacrificed there this summer.

The thrush's way of dealing with a snail, as I observed it once from behind a tree, is, first, to catch his snail, then to fly with it to one of these anvils. Then, with the snail in his beak, he raises himself on tiptoe, and, so to speak, takes a header on to the anvil, pitching the snail on to the anvil before he comes in contact with it, so as, I suppose, to avoid the jar to his beak which would be caused by his striking it violently on the stone. The snail-shell pitched in this way comes with considerable force on the anvil and is cracked. He then taps and cracks it further, shakes it till he has divested it of every scrap of shell, and flies off with it. Whether he gives it whole to the first of his offspring he happens to meet, or divides it and distributes it among them all, I do not know, as I have never followed the operation further.

I have often wondered whether birds pursue any system of turns in the feeding of their young, or whether the survival of the fittest is worked out by the strongest and the hungriest getting more than the others. On one occasion, when staying with friends in the

country, I occupied a room, in the window-*Young
sill of which was a ventilator communicating Birds*
by a shaft with the outer air. I was startled
one morning at five o'clock by a frantic
chirping issuing from this ventilating shaft,
and on looking down, saw that the bottom
was occupied by a nest of young birds
apparently only recently hatched. By ap-
proaching the ventilator noiselessly, and
putting my eye to it, I had a very good
view of the young brood, without disturbing
them. I found it a fascinating peep-show,
and used to spend a good deal of time watch-
ing them. The approach of the parent bird
(who was, I believe, a starling) was always
the sign for the young birds to open their
bills wide, and chirp—a hoarse, jarring chirp,
as if each had a different note. The parent
bird popped in and out so rapidly that, unless
I watched with all my eyes, she escaped me
altogether, and much too rapidly for me to
see which bird got the morsel. My impres-
sion was that she popped in, rammed the food
down the first beak that came handy, and flew
off again. But since, as long as I had an
opportunity of watching them, they all ap-
peared to thrive, this can hardly have been
the case.

When the young brood has left the nest,
life for the parent birds must become vastly
more complicated. For, in addition to re-
membering which they fed last, they must

remember where they all are. Possibly the hungry chirper, however, sees to it that he is not forgotten.

Two of these scattered broods have especially fascinated me lately—a family of finches and a family of robins. Both were in the fluffy, newly-fledged condition. What appealed to me especially was the anxious, round-eyed surprise of the young robins and the touching confidence of the finches.

I came across one of the latter seated in the middle of the path one day. It was of greyish green fluff, and an absolute ball, for it had its head tucked under its wing, and was fast asleep. As it was very much the colour of the ground, I felt the danger from heavy-booted gardeners too great, and picked it up to put it in the shrubbery close by. It was the sleepiest ball of fluff I ever came across. I put it in the hollow of my hand, and held my hand down among some grass and weeds, thinking it would hop out. It did nothing of the kind, however. The movement woke it, and it took its head out of the cosy fluff it had been reposing in and glanced around; then, apparently finding my warm hand much too comfortable a bed to desert, tucked its head in and went to sleep again. I watched over its slumbers for a minute or two, and then picked it up and put it on the ground, where I had the satisfaction a few minutes later of seeing the parent bird come and feed

it. The next day I found it sitting with its *Young Birds* twin at the edge of the path. They had their backs to me, and, cuddled up close together, were a touching pair. On another occasion a plaintive chirping attracted my attention, and I found one of them sitting all by itself in the middle of a bed of annuals that grew high over its head. "I'm here! all alone!" it kept saying. There was such a scene of recognition when the parent bird flew down to feed it that I felt sure it had really been lost for at least some minutes.

Though the robins were in about the same state of fledging as the finches, they seemed to me far more advanced in intelligence and the ways of the world, and, instead of possessing the sublime trust of the finches in everybody and everything, to be fully alive to the dangers that beset the life of a bird. I have always considered the robin, when full grown, an over-rated bird, who takes advantage of his red breast and the position he occupies on Christmas cards to give himself airs, and to be both cheeky and conceited. But these young robins were certainly irresistible. Their plumage was in the "un-combed," fluffy state, and their red breasts were mere splashes of brickdust. But what was so engaging was their anxious surprise at the sight of the dogs. They seemed to realise that I should do them no harm, and when alone I have passed the tree on which they

were perching, again and again, without exciting comment. But apparently they thought dogs were things you could not depend upon. I must confess that I have taken the dogs and walked round and round the tree just to watch the surprise and anxiety with which they regarded us, craning their little necks, and hopping from twig to twig the better to see the dogs, their round eyes full of anxious curiosity, and keeping up all the time a sort of interrogative chirping.

When one finds a young bird sitting by itself in the path, and with wide-open beak chirping distress and hunger, one is apt to suppose it is lost. But this is by no means always the case. Lately I found a young thrush sitting under a lavender bush, looking so forlorn and so anxious to be fed that I thought it must certainly have been deserted by its parents. I could see no sign of a mother bird, and no sign of a nest that it might have dropped from. It had been raining, and the partially fledged little creature looked so cold that I picked it up and took it indoors, and put it in a little box full of hay. I then went forth to find it a worm. It is astonishing how difficult it is to find a worm when you really want one. I dug in all the most likely places till I was quite exhausted without finding the vestige of a worm. Then, just as I was about to give it up, I found a small, thin one. I gave this to the

thrush. He gulped it down with apparent *Young Birds* satisfaction. But it seemed such a small fragment to put down his huge throat, that I supplemented it with hard-boiled egg, and bread soaked in mil'k. He devoured everything voraciously, and then was overcome with torpor. I began to repent of the responsibility I had undertaken, and to think that my interference was not likely to result in any advantage to the thrush. So I took him out again (he was considerably heavier since his meal) and deposited him again under the lavender bush. An hour or two later I went out, and found that he had had energy enough to hop out into the middle of the path. I went towards him to pick him up and put him beneath the lavender bush again, when I was startled by an excited chirping, and, looking up, saw the mother bird flying round from bush to bush, obviously in the greatest state of alarm. I beat a hasty retreat, and as from a safe distance I watched her ramming more food down his throat in a way that, considering the enormous meal he had already had, would be likely to result in a severe fit of indigestion, I reflected that it would possibly have been better for the thrush if I had minded my own business.

XXXI

*Natural
History*

WE owe it to the thrushes that there is scarcely a snail to be seen in the garden. And for this and their song I am deeply grateful to them. I am reminded, when I hear them busy cracking the shells, of an episode that occurred some years ago, when I occupied a house in a town with a small garden at the back, where there were no thrushes.

It was a house in a terrace, and the garden was one of those long strips at the back that are usual in terraces. It was a wretched, stony little patch separated from the gardens at each side by ivy-covered brick walls, and, when I took possession of it, seemed to exist solely for the purpose of feeding snails, of which there were hundreds in the ivy and in the narrow flower bed that ran round the wall. They were the common garden snail, the large sort, with a house on its back, and for the first few weeks of my tenancy the problem of my existence was how to get rid of them. For besides eating the young shoots off my favourite plants, they left the slimy

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pattern of their daily walks over everything, *Natural History* and were, in short, creatures not to be tolerated. It was the discovery that the house to my right was, and had been for some months, uninhabited, that suggested a simple and obvious way of getting rid of them—namely, by throwing them over the garden wall. There was no one there to enjoy the garden, no one to be annoyed by their presence: why should the snails not have the benefit of it?

I believe the snails occasionally showed a preference for my garden by walking back, over the garden wall; but from the fact that they gradually began to disappear I gathered that not many of them undertook the climb. For a month or two I used to throw them over at the rate of a dozen or so per day. The wall was too high for me to see over, even by standing on tip-toe, and it had never occurred to me to adopt other means for looking over and seeing what the snails were doing, till one day I heard the unwonted sound of footsteps on the gravel path. I then planted a garden-chair firmly in the flower bed near the wall, got up on it, and looked over into the next garden. It was an untidy little strip, overgrown with weeds. There was a plot of rough grass in the middle, and a stony path running round it, and in this path was an old woman in a blue cotton gown busy scraping at the weeds with a hoe. I

Natural History swept the garden with a cursory glance, and spotted a snail or two, and was then about to get down again when something attracted my attention on the path near where the old woman was scraping. It was a pile of snails, that she had apparently collected. I felt instinctively that they were my snails, and a sudden attack of self-consciousness caused me to slip down again, and, noiselessly removing the chair, walk away and simulate interest in another part of the garden. What was she going to do with the snails? I wondered. There was something French in her appearance that suggested that she might possibly be going to take them home for her supper. I had just concluded, to my satisfaction, that this must be her intention, when a slight rustling in the ivy attracted my attention, and looking round I saw two hands hanging on to the wall from the other side, down near the bottom of the garden, which were immediately followed by the top of the head and the eyes of the old woman. I shrank behind a handy water-butt and watched. The eyes surveyed the garden from one end to the other, apparently to see if there were any one there, and then head and hands were withdrawn. I was about to emerge from behind the water-butt, when a horny hand made its appearance at the same spot, full of snails, which it quietly dropped over the wall into my garden, on to the very head of my

favourite geranium. I was so much taken *Natural History* aback that I could do nothing but stand and stare. Six times did the horny hand appear over the wall, and each time a shower of snails fell from it into the flower bed below. At the sixth time I was really indignant. It was monstrous, I thought, and I darted out from behind the water-butt with an angry remonstrance on the tip of my tongue ready to hurl at it when it appeared again. Apparently it had finished, for it did not appear again, and I fell to weeding a mignonette bed by way of making up my mind what course of action to pursue.

It was true that I had been hurling snails over the wall at the rate of one to two dozen a day for the past six months. But then it was one thing to throw snails into a deserted, weedy, uninhabited old garden, where they could annoy nobody, and quite another to throw them into a tidy garden full of plants which they devoured, and inhabited by a lady whom they disgusted. The more I thought of it the more indignant I became, and I resolved to throw them all back again and as many more as I could find. I got up from my weeding determined to set about it at once, and chanced as I went towards the pile of snails to look up at the windows of the uninhabited house. It was uninhabited no longer ! The windows had been cleaned. Most of them were open, and there was an

Natural History unmistakable look of life—not to say animation—about the place. This put a new face on the situation. It would certainly not do for me to go on throwing over all the snails I picked up, as I had done for the past six months. Nevertheless, bygones must be bygones, and to have all my old snails thrown back again was more than I could stand. I would wait till the old woman had gone in, or was engaged at the other end of the garden, and then would quietly drop them all over again. When she found them all in a heap on her side of the wall it would be a gentle hint to her not to do it again. After that—well, I suppose I must invent some new method of disposing of snails.

I watched my opportunity, and gently, almost one by one, I dropped them all over again—exactly at the spot where I had seen the apparition of the horny hand. Then I washed my hands and felt ready to turn over a new leaf in the matter of snails.

I had not yet arrived at any satisfactory method of dealing with them when, the next day, as I was walking in the garden near the scene of the horny hand, I was startled by hearing a voice quite close to me, just on the other side of the wall, say, “Just look here, my dear ; this is a very remarkable thing.”

I stood still and listened. The voice was obviously masculine, and I at once pictured a

little old gentleman in a wideawake hat. *Natural History* A step crunched along the gravel path, *History* and another voice, obviously feminine, said, "What?"

"Why, these snails," said the first voice. "I was not aware that snails were gregarious, and yet here is a perfect flock of them—hundreds, indeed—all swarming on and about this weed." There was a pause, during which I stood, afraid to move, partly overcome with a sense of guilt, and partly exercised in suppressing my laughter. And then the second voice said, "Well, I never!"

"It appears to be only an ordinary dandelion, too," said the first voice again. "And yet there must be something unusual about it to attract the snails in this way."

"Well, we'd better get rid of them at once," said voice number two, with cheerful alacrity. "We don't want them here. The garden seems infested with them. Look here—and here! Salt and water's the only thing. I'll get a can full and pop them in." Her footsteps retreated, and I heard her call, "Mary, just put a couple of handfuls of salt into this can and fill it up with boiling water. I want to put the snails into it." There was a pause, during which I listened intently, and then footsteps (two sets) came along the walk again, and a can was plumped down. Then began a rattling of shells and a

splashing of water, and a hoarse voice, which I imagined to be Mary's, croaked, "Well, I'm sure! I never heard of that way of killing snails. I thought the only way was to stamp on 'em. But that's a messy job, and spoils your shoes. In general, I throw 'em over the wall into the next garden."

"What, shoot our rubbish into our neighbour's garden! Mary, Mary!" said voice number one in gentle remonstrance. And then he added, half to himself, "Very remarkable, very remarkable what there can be in that dandelion to attract them in such numbers."

As for me, I had thought of a plan with regard to which I will merely remark that the old gentleman's surprise was a source of interest and delight to me for months to come, until, in fact, I left the house. Every day he found a swarm of snails on the dandelion, and each time he was more surprised than the time before. "I believe, my dear," I heard him say on one occasion, "that the snails come miles to visit it."

He wrote letters to the local paper about it, and on one occasion a fierce correspondence on the subject of snails and dandelions raged for a month—until, in fact, the editor was obliged to insert a notice to the effect that the correspondence must cease. Needless to say, I perused it with the deepest interest. The last step he took in my hearing, just

before I went away, was to collect the seeds *Natural* of the dandelion in order to propagate it, *History* and distribute it among his friends who were troubled with snails.

XXXII

*By the
Sea-shore*

IT was the Heat Wave that drove me to the sea. And for that, and the fact that he baked me through and through till my very bones were warm, I shall always be grateful. For a week I lay in a hammock beneath the willow tree with the least possible amount of clothing on—a muslin gown and a shady hat—and absorbed the Heat Wave, and watched the thrushes out on the sun-baked grass taking shower-baths under the garden sprinkler. If I could have stood with the thrushes beneath the sprinkler I believe I should have been perfectly happy. But there were difficulties in the way of my doing so, and I had to content myself with dreams. I lay and built castles in the air. I built them in my own garden. The baking lawn became a marble-lined swimming-bath, and in it I imagined myself swimming and diving from morn till eve. But I opened my eyes and saw that it was

nothing but a hot grass plot, gradually turning brown in the sun ; and that the only water was the shower from the garden-hose, in which the thrushes bathed. *By the Sea-shore*

Then I bethought me that after all I lived on an island ; and that all around me, at no very great distance, sea waves were running in over the sand, lapping on the shelly beach or shingly shore, or playing round the rocky cliffs as the case might be. The thought was enough. I packed and fled to the seaside. The exigencies of circumstances did not allow of my fleeing to my ideal seaside spot, which is a shelly cove between rocks, with a crystal-clear sea, and remote from human habitation. I was obliged to content myself with one nearer at hand—one which had partly succumbed to the ravages of civilisation. But to my sea-thirsty soul it was charming and refreshing. There was a pleasant curving coast line, which civilisation had not yet battened down under a concrete esplanade. Turf, from which every tinge of green had dried, patched with gorse and blackberry bushes and bare grey spots of shingle and sand, made a wide band of uneven ground, which followed the line of the sea, inland. Then came a band of shelving shingle, then yellow-grey sand which met the sea.

Though I am an enthusiastic bather, and, once I am in, delight in wallowing in the sea,

By the Sea-shore I find it takes all the courage and determination I possess to drive me to take the first plunge. Consequently when, with towel and bathing-gown under one arm, and a book under the other, I scrunch down the shingle every morning towards the bathing machines, instead of getting boldly into the first one I find empty, flinging off my clothes and leaping into the sea, I sit down on the shore to think about it. While thinking about it, I watch the groups of humanity scattered round me on the shore, and particularly a small scrap of humanity that answers (or does not answer, as it feels inclined) to the name of "Baby," and who belongs to a family group that takes up a considerable patch of shingle not far from the spot where it is my habit to seat myself while engaged in thinking about it.

The family is a fair type of the average British family at the seaside. There are two little girls with long hair down their backs, aged about nine and ten, a brown-faced boy of about eight, another a little younger, the individual called Baby, a placid, motherly-looking nurse, and a nursemaid. The nurse carries a horizontal bundle on her knee, which looks like, and I have reason to believe is, another baby. But as it never seems to assume any position but the horizontal, it is probably too young to count—too young, apparently, for the last "Baby" to have yet

abdicated in its favour. Late in the morning *By the Sea-shore* a smart young "mother," wearing a sailor hat and neat shirt and skirt, puts in an appearance, and occasionally a good-looking man in flannels and straw hat, who is hailed as "Dad," joins the party. I am never in time to see the family bathe. When I arrive on the scene they have already done so, and are finishing their toilet on the shingle. The little girls, who wear broad-brimmed sailor hats, black and white cotton shirts, and serge skirts, have their wet hair hanging or combed straight down their backs, and are engaged in drying their long, thin, brown legs, rubbing the sand from between their toes, and putting on their shoes and stockings, which they extract from a large bundle made of a bath towel, wherein seems to be everything that a family at the seaside can possibly want, from bathing-gowns and boots, to babies' bottles and buns. The boys are as a rule munching the buns, the nurse, with the horizontal bundle on her knee, is gazing at the other groups dotted about on the shore, while the nurse-maid—a young person of about seventeen, called Kate—with a distracted look on her face, is darting about between the bundle and the various members of the group, and trying to attend to every one's wants at once. "Kate, do give me my stockings. Please tie my hair. Ow ! you *hurt* !! Oh, Kate ! *do* find the comb ; I've asked you a dozen times

By the Sea-shore at least ! Some one's taken the stocking of my left leg ! Do look in the bundle, Kate. I say, there 're not enough buns to go round ; someone's had two. Bother, there goes my shoe-string. Just tie it, Kate. Give me the Baby's bottle, Kate—there it is ! don't you see, just under your hand ! Look sharp, there's a good girl ! " and so on. Whenever she is not engaged in giving someone something—whenever, indeed, she has a moment's respite—Kate runs after the little object called Baby, picks it up and puts it somewhere else. At first I wondered why she did this ; for Baby did not appear to be doing anything that mattered, only filling a pail with sand and emptying it out again. But after some days' observation I came to the conclusion that it was a mild form of hysteria on Kate's part. She had got so into the way of scurrying about that she could not stop, and whenever a pause suggested a moment's doubt as to what she should do next, she made it a rule to rush and pick up Baby and put it somewhere else.

I guess Baby's age to be about two. He (or possibly she) consists of striped bathing pants, which are fastened round its neck, and into which all its clothes are tucked, a large white sunbonnet, and two pink legs. It is unlike the rest of the family, in that it has no taste for family groups, but prefers to go its own way independently, to

pursue its own avocation with bucket and *By the
spade and bare legs, undisturbed and un-
aided. Occasionally the deep frill of its sun-
bonnet blows up enough for me to catch
sight of a chubby brown face full of delight-
ful determination and good-humour. Indeed,
as long as they let it alone to paddle and dig
and fill its pail, it is the best-tempered baby I
have ever seen. It does not even resent Kate
periodically picking it up and putting it
somewhere else, but submits, its pink legs
dangling passively, till it is put down, and
then quietly toddles back to where it had been
before, and continues its occupation. But
when the rest of the family have dried their
hair and their legs, put their shoes and stock-
ings on and eaten their buns, the distracted
Kate turns her attention to capturing Baby
and doing the same for him. Then Baby
shows fight. He desires to paddle and dig all
day, and he resists the effort to put his shoes
and socks on with all his might. Kate's first
move is to pick him up and run with him
to the bundle and put him down beside it,
while she dives for his shoes and socks. As
soon as she puts him down he is off again as
hard as he can go, and Kate after him.
When she has brought him back about six
times, the pink legs kicking hard the whole
time, she sits down with him on her knee and
proceeds to hold him there with one hand,
while with the other she dries the pink legs*

*By the
Sea-shore*

and hunts for the shoes and socks. Baby's method during this performance is to make himself perfectly stiff. The pink legs look like two sticks, the striped body like a little tub, and the sunbonnet leans back over the nursemaid's knee, and is almost lost to sight. As a rule, Kate fails to find the shoes and socks with one hand (nobody helps her), and has to remove the restraining hand from the stiff infant. When she does this, Baby is off and away again like a shot, tearing down to the sea, and Kate, casting the bundle to the winds, in hot pursuit, to the delight of the other children, who shout encouragement, "Run, Baby! she'll catch you!" As a rule Kate, who has long legs, catches him before he reaches the water. When this happens, as often as not he throws himself flat on the ground, and becomes rigid again. Occasionally Kate wins, but as a rule she is hopelessly beaten, and the tussle ends in Nurse (who is singularly apathetic during the encounter) saying, "Here, Kate, take the Baby, and give me the child." The refractory Baby becomes a lamb at once. All Nurse does, as far as I can see, is to admonish him gently, coax him with a few honeyed words. The stiff little legs become limp and tractable. He lets them be dried, and even shows a certain amount of interest in having the sand removed from his toes, and submits without a murmur to having the

striped paddling pants stripped off and the *By the*
crumpled pink pinafore smoothed out. From *Sea-shore*
his beatific and absorbed expression, and the
murmuring voice of Nurse, I gather she is
telling him a story.

XXXIII

*From the
Bathing-
machine*

HERE is no such substantive as "bathe" in the English language, says the philologist. To say "I have had a delicious bathe this morning" is not English. You must say "I have had a delicious sea bath." If I wished to bandy words with the philologist, I should tell him that a sea bath and a sea bathe are perfectly distinct things. The former you manufacture in your own room by the judicious mingling of a little crystallised sea salt and water from the common tap. The latter is to be enjoyed only at the seaside, under the open heavens, and the mingling of salt and water is entrusted to Nature.

I do not wish, however, to bandy words with the philologist, so I will content myself with asserting my right to express myself as I please, by remarking that during the last fortnight I have enjoyed a series of delicious bathes, such as I have not had since childhood. The sea has, for the most part, been as smooth as glass, with the sun shining on it, and so warm that, but for the necessity of sometimes emerging for a meal, I could have

swum in it all day long. Indeed, looking *From the back*, it seems as if the fortnight has been, *Bathing-machine* saving the philologist's presence, one long bathe. It is true that not more than half an hour out of the twenty-four has actually been spent in the sea. But the rest of the day has been spent in anticipation or retrospection. No sooner was one bathe over than I have begun to think of the next. My mind has dwelt on tides and winds ; my eyes have rested continually on the sea, and though my actual body may not have been in it, I feel that my astral body has rarely been out of it.

The drowsy warmth that comes over one, as, after bathing in the sea, one sits in the sun on the shore watching other folk disport themselves, lends itself to musing and meditation. And during the last fortnight I have mused and meditated much. Much of my musing has concerned itself with other people on the shore ; and especially with large families of children (such as the one of which "Baby" is a member), that tumble into one end of the bathing-machine and out of the other so transformed that one hardly recognises them, and proceed to rend the air with laughter and screams. They remind me of the delightful bathes of my childhood, when we all undressed in one stuffy tent, and rushing down over the sands plunged into the sea, and indulged in romps until we were

*From the
Bathing-
machine*

peremptorily ordered out. I have amused myself trying to identify the well-dressed and befringed young women that go in at one end of the bathing-machine with the curious creatures that emerge from the other end into the sea, and have meditated much on the wonders worked by a little raiment and an ornamental coiffure ; and have noted the fact that the average woman does not look her best when, having bathed, she staggers over the shingle, a dripping, draggled creature, clutching the empty air as she tries to keep her balance when the sharp stones hurt her bare feet, in her effort to gain the privacy of her bathing-machine. But most of all I have meditated on the problem why it is that so few women learn to swim.

This morning, having bathed till I could bathe no more, I stood in the sun at the open door of my bathing-machine, putting the finishing touches to my toilet, and looking out upon a glassy sea in which other people were still disporting themselves. The sea was dotted with sailing-boats at anchor, lying so motionless that their masts were reflected in perpendicular lines. There was a white haze round the horizon, in which tiny fishing-boats looked black and picturesque.

Six black torpedo-destroyers that scooted across my plane of vision in the distance, leaving curlywigs of murky smoke and diamond sparkles in their wake, gave me food

for reflection on international disarmament. *From the*
But the subject was unsuited to my mood, *Bathing-*
and the drowsy content that was suffusing me *machine*
as I absorbed the sun and sea. I turned my
attention nearer shore, to the bathers. A
party of women and little girls had emerged
from the two machines next to mine. There
was a "Mother," an "Auntie," and four
girls, aged about ten to fourteen. They went
out till the sea was up to their waists. Then
they joined hands in a circle and bobbed up
and down and screamed. Occasionally the
Mother and Auntie requested the two youn-
ger children to "wet their heads," a request
they paid no attention to. Then they tried
to get them to come out a little further that
they might at least wet their shoulders.
They even took hold of them and tried to
drag them. But the children screamed so
loudly that they gave it up, and turned their
attention to swimming themselves, with one
foot touching the bottom. Once one of
them slipped, and her face went under, where-
upon she flopped and floundered for a second
or two before she regained her feet, and then
had hysterics and came out. The men's
bathing machines were a few yards off along
the shore, and from where I stood I could see
a party of boys of approximately the same
ages as the bobbing girls, wallowing in the
sea like porpoises. One little chap, who
looked about ten, swam and dived like any

From the fish. They seemed just as much at home with their heads under water as out.

Bathing-machine The two parties are fair specimens of hundreds that may be seen at any English seaside place, of bobbing girls and swimming boys. The fact is that while swimming is considered part of every boy's education, it is looked upon as a mere unnecessary accomplishment for a girl. She may swim if she likes ; if not it does not matter. A boy of twelve is ashamed to own that he cannot swim ; whereas a girl of twelve may feel proud if she can. In these athletic days, when so much attention is paid to the physical culture of girls as well as boys, it is surely surprising that so little stress should be laid on the importance of teaching girls to swim. As exercise, swimming is both healthy and delightful. The most surly old grumbler cannot denounce it as unfeminine. And it is, moreover, the sport of all others which may prove of practical use in the emergency of an accident. Neither is it open to the objections urged against football and other violent forms of exercise, that the more delicate female frame may be injured by it. A woman may swim and dive with as little danger of hurting herself as a man.

Given boys and girls, moreover, of from six to ten years old, they will be found pretty equal in the matter of pluck and nerves. Indeed, many people will tell you that boys

are more imaginative, and as a consequence *From the Bathing-machine* more nervous than girls. But whereas great pressure is put upon a boy to conquer his nerves, a girl is allowed to cling to hers as a sort of feminine prerogative. A boy is held up to such ridicule if he allows it to be seen for a moment that he is afraid of the water, such awful pictures are put before him of what will happen when he goes to school and it is found that he cannot swim, that if he is worth his salt he exerts himself to the utmost and conquers his nervous terror. In many cases his nerves are dealt with more summarily. Arguments and persuasion are dispensed with, and he is "chucked" into the sea, his instinct for self-preservation being trusted to to keep his head above water.

Of course we all know brilliant examples of women and girls who swim and dive as well as any man ; and a very pretty sight it is to see a graceful girl swimming in the sea. Such a one is Molly, whom it is my good fortune sometimes to watch from the door of my bathing-machine. Molly is a lithe maiden of nine. She belongs to a family all of whom are expert swimmers ; but she is, if not the most expert of them all, at least the most amphibious, so much so that by common consent she is allowed to stay in a quarter of an hour after the rest have come out. She has a healthy, tanned complexion, a mass of golden brown

From the hair that floats about her as she swims (reminding one of the picture of Alice in *Wonderland* when swimming in the pool of tears), and she wears a pink knickerbocker bathing gown. She is so much in her element in the sea that I sometimes wonder if she is not a little mermaiden. She will lie lazily in the water like a seal, looking about her, and giving an occasional kick with one of the pink knickerbockered legs to keep herself going ; then suddenly dive, swim under water, and appear some yards further off, shaking her mane from her face. Sometimes her father swims over from the men's bathing place. She swims to meet him, and then one may witness a pretty bit of "mixed bathing." Molly rollicks and gambols with him, dives from his shoulders, and ends by swimming out to sea with him, and being drawn in again on her back.

XXXIV

THE hotel faces the sea. Nothing but a *A strip of sun-burnt turf separates it from the band of shingle that runs east and west in a sweeping curve as far as the eye can see.* My bedroom window is in front, and as I lie in bed in the morning I can look at a picture, set in the window-frame, of shining sea, with a couple of yachts and a rowing-boat lying motionless and at anchor on its surface.

This morning the sunshine is so bright that it lures me from my bed on to the balcony that runs beneath my window, where, leaning on the railing, I gaze with eyes still shrouded with the mist of sleep at the early morning world. I follow in a rapid glance the coastline, which curves boldly east and west till it is lost in the horizon ; then sweep the shining sea, dwelling for a dreamy instant on the yachts and boats ; then settle down lazily on the patch of turf, shingle, sand, and lapping sea immediately beneath my eyes.

Though it is nearly eight o'clock, and the

*A
Morning
Dip*

sun has been busy for hours, the little world surrounding me seems barely astir. Near a dilapidated black boat, which lies sunk in shingle and sand, and which, with bits of timber, chests, lobster pots, and sea-side squalor strewn around, forms an open-air encampment for its owner, I can see the boatman—popularly known as Charlie—busy, pipe in mouth, over something that looks like a fishing-net. Of the dozen or so of bathing-machines that belong to him, three are down at the water's edge. Near them, in the sea, feminine screams and laughter attract my attention to a group of women in pink, red, and blue, who, up to their waists in the water, are holding hands and bobbing up and down, after the manner of the Englishwoman at the sea-side. Further out, I can see the black heads of two men, swimming towards a boat at anchor. I watch them idly as they reach the boat, climb in, dive, and appear again some yards off, to wallow, and splash, and play like porpoises. And then the sunshine and freshness dispel my drowsiness. I must go out and plunge in that cool, clear, sunny sea, before I have my breakfast.

I perform a hasty toilet, and in a few minutes, towel and bathing-gown hung over my arm, I have passed the slippery, sandy turf, and am crunching down the shingle to a bathing-box that stands empty and inviting at the water's edge. And as I go towards it I

pass old Biled Beef, standing gaunt, loose-limbed, and half-asleep near a patch of blue-
serge bathing-gowns spread out on the shingle *A Morning Dip*
to dry.

“He draws up the bathing-machines in the summer, and in the winter they turn him into biled beef,” said the cynic of our party ; and the name had stuck to him.

A curious, lonely figure in alien surroundings, life must be a strange affair from Biled Beef’s point of view. The garish sea-side world, the sunshine and breeze playing over the waves, the voices of children, digging and paddling ; the screams of bedraggled women pretending to swim—what a curious, unmeaning dream it must all appear.

Biled Beef’s gaunt limbs and sinews still bespeak strength ; and it is the pathos and irony of his position that he is at the beck and call of a small boy whom he could, did he know it (or wish, rather, for he must surely know it), annihilate with a stamp of his hoof. The boy is a sturdy urchin of twelve, brown-faced and vigorous ; he wears a loose blue woollen jersey, and brown corduroy knicker-bockers, and has a swinging, slouching gait, adapted to the slippery, shelving shingle, up and down which he is for ever walking, dragging the old horse, also slouching, but reluctant, at the end of a strap. For though Biled Beef must, from frequent repetition, know every detail of his daily routine by

heart, he never by so much as a gesture acquiesces in it, but passively lets himself be dragged, pushed, shoved through it, step by step, inch by inch, by the small, brown-faced boy.

At first I detested the small boy for the insolent way he lorded it over Biled Beef ; for his "Hi's!" his "Kim hups!" and the way he flicked at him with the halter. But observation of the pair has convinced me that Biled Beef is barely conscious of what is going on ; that while his gaunt carcase stands apathetic and drooping by the bathing machine or flops with loose, heavy hoofs up and down the shingle, his spirit is far away in a dream of happier surroundings.

How else could he be proof against the glittering briskness of such a morning as this? And yet there he stands, unmoved as ever, though warm, invigorating sunshine is beating on his back, and the air seems to sparkle with life, his eyes half closed, his whole bearing showing that he is unconscious of the tangible world in which his gaunt hulk is such a prominent figure.

Even the sturdy boy has caught alertness and spryness from the morning. He whistles jauntily as he appears over the brow of the turf, and walks down towards the old horse. For the tide is flowing swiftly in and Biled Beef's services are required. Already it is flowing in round the empty machine towards

which I am making, and if left much longer *A Morning Dip*
it will flow in through the open door.

“Hi!” shouts the brown-faced boy. But *Dip*
Biled Beef does not budge. The boy seizes
the strap and flicks him on the neck, then
gives a tug. Biled Beef, whose head has been
towards land, slowly turns. His movements
are like those of a clumsy, lumbering cart.
One expects to hear him creak.

“Kim hup!” shouts the boy again when
he has turned his head seawards; and halter
in hand he starts off down the shingle dragging
Biled Beef after him. Not till his head is
dragged out to its utmost do the great limbs
move; and then slowly, unwillingly they flop
down towards the machine.

“Now then!” cries the boy, for he must
turn again. This time he shoves and slaps.
Slowly the great beast turns again and stands
drooping and despondent, his head towards
land. Shouts, shoves, and flicks with the
strap again. But this time a stronger impetus
is needed. It is given by a small pebble flung
at his leg, and the old horse starts forward
dragging the heavy bathing-machine behind
him.

When it has subsided into rest, and Biled
Beef is unhitched, I walk up the board and
enter the little cabin, and throwing open the
other door to sunshine and sea, divest myself
of my clothing and don a bathing-gown. In
another moment I am wading out enjoying

*A
Morning
Dip*

the delicious sensation of the cool sea-water lapping up, up, up, till it reaches my neck. Then I let go my hold on the sandy bottom, and trusting myself wholly to the sea, swim and float and disport myself till cold and weariness drive me a dripping, staggering creature, up the steps and into the machine again.

A few minutes later, clothed, and in my right mind, warm, drowsy, and ready for breakfast, I walk down the board again on to the shingle. I carry my wet bathing-gown, held away from my skirts, my towel, and a piece of bread. The latter was originally destined to assuage the pangs of hunger, should they assail me. But lately it has filled another function. Biled Beef having just dragged up a machine, stands in his usual drooping attitude in my path. I hold a flat palm, with the piece of bread on it beneath his nose. He does not move, or even open his half-closed eyes to see where it comes from. But the grey lips part, circumvent the bread, draw it in, and slowly and meditatively he crunches it up. I stroke his nose and call him "a poor old thing," but without eliciting the faintest response, hardly so much as the movement of an eyelid.

If I were inclined to doubt it, this little episode of the bread, enacted every morning in precisely the same manner, and with the same results, would convince me that Biled

Beef's spirit is far away from the scene of his *A*
labours, from the shingle, the bathing-machines, *Morning*
and the little brown-faced tyrant. *Dip*

And, after all, who would wish to call him
back?

SEEN from the window as one whirls along in a train, one level crossing is much like another. The little wooden box of a house painted white, or tarred black, as the case may be ; the wide, low gates with the gateman mounting guard, and the miscellaneous collection of vehicles waiting for the gates to be opened that they may pursue their way along the road, temporarily barred by the passing of a train. One glances at it without interest, looking upon it as a mere detail in the mechanical squalor that trails along the railway train's murky path ; part and parcel with the lines, stations, signal-boxes, telegraph-posts that mark the fair face of the landscape with their ugly straight lines and squares and blocks.

But in this world everything is a question of the point of view. And, as the train in which we ourselves happen to be travelling is a creature of importance, whose departure, arrival, and career for the time being, are of as great moment as any affair of State, while

the train we see winding along in the distance, or dashing past as we stand in the station, is no more to us than a toy train ; so even a level crossing may become interesting, if, instead of being merely one of a series dashing past the train window, it is for the time being the standpoint from which we view the world.

At the
Level
Crossing

For a long time I looked upon the level crossing as a tiresome obstruction on a road along which I frequently bicycled, a point at which I must dismount, whether I liked it or not, and wait till the white bars across the road were removed that I might pass. Gradually I began to look upon it as a sort of halfway house, and took to dismounting to rest and look about me, whether the gates were open or shut. There was something soothing and refreshing in the flat expanse of country that lay around it, and I sometimes spent as much as half an hour leaning against the railing near the gates, and gazing out at the sky and fields.

The country about the level crossing is as flat as a pancake. Standing between the gates you can see miles along the line, or down the dusty high road that crosses it. At one side of the road one looks over a sunk fence at a hayfield, that seems to stretch away to the misty blue fringe of trees of the distant horizon, and that at this time of year changes its scene from day to day.

*At the
Level
Crossing*

I have passed it late in the day, bathed in evening sunshine and mist. Little heaps of hay lay peacefully absorbing the sun, one side shining with light, the other casting dark, long-shaped shadows on the stubble. Through a railing I could see sheep in a pen busy over their evening meal, the curves of their backs shining in luminous lines. A soft haze over everything seemed to express drowsy, dream-like rest. The next day I passed it in a blaze of summer heat and sunshine. Distant voices and farmyard sounds made a summer-like hum. A hay-cart piled up with hay stood in the middle of the field, and men in shady hats were busy about it. One stood on the top, knee-deep in hay, while others pitchforked the little heaps up to him, and the great sleek cart-horses stood patiently lashing at the flies with their tails.

On the other side of the road cornfields, lined with poppy red that flushes and fades in the breeze, carry one's eyes as far as a line of silver pollarded willows that bend over and conceal the winding river. And down the road one's eyes travel till they lose themselves in the dusky towers and spires of a large town.

But the chief feature of the level crossing is its sky. There seems to be more sky there than in any spot I know. Such a vast expanse stretches overhead and all around one that the hayfields, the cornfields, the level

crossing itself, dwindle when one looks up, to a mere mat spread beneath a vast and never-ending dome.

For some time after I took to resting at the level crossing I looked only at the landscape. My eyes ignored the gates, the rails, and the gateman's house, and wandered about the hayfield and the horizon. Then my focus narrowed itself, and I took to looking over a little railing at the side of the gates for the approaching train, and watching the opening and shutting of the gates and the bisecting streams of traffic. The level crossing was like the pattern we drew as children when we played "noughts-and-crosses," and I felt vaguely that the train or cart that forced the gates open that they might draw a line through the centre, scored a point.

In one direction the rails go off straight for miles till they find their vanishing point somewhere near the horizon. The approaching train looks at first like a small spot on the line, a long way off. For a long time it remains a small and apparently motionless spot in the far distance, and it is difficult to believe it is moving towards one. Soon it begins to look like a train, and when it gets as far as that the rest is soon over. It bears down upon us, getting rapidly larger, like a nightmare, till with a rattle and a roar it has dashed past and left us startled and

*At the
Level
Crossing*

shaken with the rapidity of its coming and going.

From the opposite direction the approaching train suddenly appears gliding round a curve, and is hardly in full sight before it has swept off. There is a suave dignity in its colossal glide-past, and it is a less terrible and also less fascinating monster than the other, bearing down upon us with increasing pace and fury from a distance.

In one of the corners formed by the "noughts-and-crosses" pattern, stands the gateman's little house. And, when all is said and done, this is the most interesting patch in the level crossing. The little black wooden house has an overhanging upper storey, like a windmill. At one side the lower storey projects into a bow window, bright with geraniums. A black water-butt balances this on the other side, and a little white fence with a gate finishes it off in front. It is as complete and neat as a toy house. The front projects into a little porch, and here, as a rule, unless he happens to be out in the road, the gateman is to be seen on the watch to open and shut those everlasting gates. Sometimes I have caught sight of other members of the gateman's family, his little boy, and possibly his daughter. But as a rule the only living creatures to be seen are the gateman, the cat, and the "chick." And from a decorative point of view, I would ask for no more. The

cat is a thick-furred British tabby cat, with *At the*
a dignified, somewhat stern bearing, and a Level
great air of proprietorship. She is, I believe,
a perfect virago where dogs are concerned,
and I have seen her dash out and attack with
fury, and apparently unprovoked, a harmless
cur who happened to be passing. Doubtless,
she had her own reasons for this onslaught.
As a rule, she maintains a decorous and
orthodox attitude, sitting upright with her
front paws together and her tail wound round
her, and looking as if she existed for purposes
of decoration only.

The "chick" has a more striking personality even than the cat. And I have watched her career with interest. She was bought for a modest sixpence by the gate-man's little boy, from the farm over the way. When I first saw her she was a slim young thing, inclined to gawkiness, pecking about in the road near the level crossing. Now she is a fat, fluffy, matronly hen with ten gawky chicks of her own. The first time I saw her I remarked to the gate-man that I thought she looked lonely pecking about all by herself, and was told that this could not be the case, since she was free to come and go as she pleased, and indeed spent a great part of the day over at the farm with her old friends. Some weeks later I was told that the chick had laid an egg, and, shortly after, that she had hatched ten chicks of her own.

*At the
Level
Crossing*

I was even shown the brood—ten bright-eyed balls of fluff—some black and some yellow, cuddled up together in a basket. I was away for a week or two after that, and when I next passed the level crossing there was the original chick tied by the leg to the gate-post (lest she should lead her brood under the trains), and grown so large and matronly, and with such a look of responsibility in her eye, that I scarcely recognised her, while in the ditch and about the gate-house and the road, straggled ten gawky chickens, distracting their poor mother by their erratic wanderings. For though she had a long tether, it was not long enough to enable her to follow them whither she would. Yesterday I missed her from her post, and asked the gateman where she was. He pointed over the gate to some bushes on the bank. "She's in there," he said, "sitting on a nest of eggs. She seemed to want to have some more, so we thought we had better let her have her own way."

XXXVI

ONE of the most fundamental differences between the boy and the girl is that, while the girl is interested in people the boy is interested in things. To the boy, the world is a place full of steam-engines, ships, birds, beasts, and fishes, and innumerable other interesting objects, all of which he wants to look at. He goes about like a dog, sniffing at everything, and, as some one has said, thinking nothing too insignificant for investigation. There are human beings in the boy's world, too. But they are only part of the general show ; not one whit more interesting than the guinea-pigs he keeps in a hutch, and a good deal less interesting than a steam-engine. To the girl the world is a place full of people. All the rest are mere etceteras. Her relation to the other people and their relation to each other absorb all her attention, and other things are considered only in so far as they concern the individual.

Only yesterday I sat in a train and watched an example of this afforded by a small boy and girl, obviously twins, of about five years old. The boy's whole soul was absorbed in the

interesting objects rushing past. Glued to the window he watched the passing trains, the coal-trucks, the telegraph-posts, the cows, sheep, and pigs in the fields with passionate eagerness, every now and then turning excitedly to call his nurse's attention to some entrancing object, and to ask questions. The little girl hardly looked out of the window at all. Her attention was entirely riveted on her nurse, her eyes eagerly scanning her countenance to read approval or disapproval of everything she did. Nothing, not even the putting on and off of her gloves, was done without glancing to see how it would be taken. There was something pathetic in her morbid desire for notice, her craving for sympathy. She would rather have disapproval than feel that the relation was severed for an instant.

Whether women's interest in people, as opposed to men's interest in things, is a matter of education or nature, it is difficult to say. Certainly the way girls are brought up tends to foster any leaning there may be in that direction. The home-grown girl is encouraged to make the characters and ways of those surrounding her her constant study, to centre her affections and her thoughts on the relations and friends that compose her home-life, and discouraged from letting her interest become absorbed in anything which may draw her thoughts from her home and

the individuals of her family. A boy, on the other hand, sent out into the world into the *People and Things* midst of strangers who have, comparatively speaking, no claim on his affections or thoughts, is led to act, as far as possible independently of them, to disregard them, and turn his attention away from them, to the important "things" of life, which go to complete his physical and mental education.

That nature may also have something to say to this difference of attitude towards the world, in the two sexes, one is inclined to think, from the fact that it shows itself before education has begun, or has had time to have any result—as soon, in fact, as children begin to walk and talk and show the first signs of intelligence. A little girl's thoughts will turn as naturally to dolls—effigies of human beings—as those of a little boy to guns and boats. If a girl have no doll she will make anything she can pick up do duty for one: a bit of wood, a pillow. But whatever her dolls may be, she invests them, in imagination, with human personalities, and will amuse herself for hours with their imaginary conversations and doings. The puppets in her doll's-house are, to her, real people, whose imaginary daily life is, with an imaginative child, as real and engrossing as her own. Even without dolls their games will be of people—not as in the case with boys, of the buccaneers and pirates of their books, but of the people they see

around them in their daily life. They are never tired of "pretending" they are grown up ; of the social game of "house" or the domestic game of mothers and children. The stories they like best (next to fairy-tales, which appeal especially to the imagination of all children) are simple stories of the doings of other children.

My bedroom window looks out on the road. This morning early, a traction-engine passed, dragging after it one of those bright red, straggling, long-legged affairs one sees in the harvest-fields at this time of year. A traction-engine at rest in a field, having brought its threshing tackle to anchor, is an unsightly object, though the bright red threshing-machine, with the elevator tossing the straw up on to the back of the stack, is not unpicturesque, nor the "whirring" sound it makes as it does its work unpleasant, nor out of harmony with summer sounds and sunshine ; but a traction-engine at work is a very different looking thing. At rest it is a clumsy, lifeless mass of black iron, out of place and incongruous in so lively, busy a scene as that going on in a harvest-field. At work it becomes at once inspired with life, personality, and character.

I was aware of its approach some minutes before it came in sight by the jerky, puffing of the steam, the grinding of the heavy wheels over the stones, and the rattling and

jangling of machinery that always accompanies it, and went to the window to look out. Nothing is so fussy and full of its own importance as a traction-engine. As the sleek little black thing came in sight, puffing and snorting, you would have thought it had the whole earth in tow, instead of a few yards of threshing-machine. There was a foolish, straggling look about the red wheels, ladder, and drum of the latter—a vague inconsequence and incoherence, compared with the determined, resolute little engine which seemed almost bursting with individuality. They had obviously nothing to do but let themselves be dragged along. All the responsibility lay with the engine. As one saw the energy and soul he put into the work, one felt that the work of dragging a threshing-machine from one harvest-field to another was not such a trivial matter as one might suppose.

Along the footpath, all their eager eyes fixed on the puffing, rattling procession, seeming to keep time with it as with a marching regiment, walked a crowd of little boys, aged from about four to nine. There were about twenty of them. But what struck me especially was that not one little girl accompanied them. Indeed, the only petticoat in sight anywhere on the road was that of a woman with a basket on her arm, on her way to market. And I noticed that her eyes dwelt on the little boys, not on the engine.

A traction-engine on its way through a village can always count on drawing all the little boys from the gutters and alleys to follow in its wake. But it takes a wedding, or a christening, or a funeral to draw the girls and women. Not long ago I found a street blocked with a crowd consisting entirely of men and boys. All were standing gazing silently at something going on in the centre of the ring they formed. From their attitudes and expressions I gathered that something of surpassing interest was going on, and pushed my way a little through the crowd to see what it was. They were laying down a wood pavement by some new process—that was all ! It is an instant draw to all the little boys within sight, for a waterworks man to investigate one of the fire-plugs in the road and let off water ; or for a sanitary inspector to probe a drain. The arrival of a steam-packet at a sea-side place will draw a crowd down to the landing stage—a mixed crowd, of both men and women, it is true ; but any one who cares to observe will see that the women go to look at the passengers, while the men go to look at the steamer, and watch its movements and the operations of the crew as they bring it alongside the wharf.

XXXVII

THERE is something ludicrous in the *James* spectacle of the human boy turned to domestic use, in the shape of a button-boy. This is largely owing to the fact that the boy, being an outdoor animal, looks out of place in the house. But it is also owing to an abnormal sense of humour implanted in the boy by nature, and to the interest he takes in things in general.

If you take a boy at the age when his interest in things in general is most diverse and at the same time most intense, and expect him to apply himself entirely to the polishing of the silver, or the answering of the bell, you expect too much. With a world teeming with distractions just outside, it is impossible for him to concentrate his attention on such domestic details. He must devote a certain amount of time to inquiry and investigation into things in general. Indeed, considering what he has to contend with in this respect, it is surprising that he should acquit himself with as much credit as he frequently does in his capacity of household boy.

The abnormal sense of humour implanted in the boy, and which shows itself as soon as he becomes a domestic "Buttons," arises, I think, from the fact that he has no respect of persons. The human being inspires him with no more awe or respect than does his guinea-pig. Consequently in the dress, pomp, and ceremonies of social life, he finds endless sources of amusement and incentives to what are known as practical jokes—jokes at the expense of the assumed dignity of the individual.

A friend tells me she frequently visits at a house where a button-boy, with an abnormal sense of humour, opens the door. For reasons known only to himself, this button-boy regards her as a huge joke. Her appearance is always the signal for his going off into convulsions of ill-suppressed mirth. As she follows him upstairs she can see him shaking. If she addresses him so that he has to turn and answer, he immediately explodes, and then turns his head into a corner and remains doubled up till he has recovered. She longs to say, "Now, tell me, boy, what is it about me that amuses you so much?" But her instinct tells her that this remark would be the signal for him to burst into roars of laughter that nothing would quell. Lately she has found his mirth infectious, so that they go up the stairs both shaking with silent laughter, and pulling themselves together at

the top, enter the drawing-room with crimson *James* faces and their eyes full of tears.

James's fault was his interest in things in general, especially in the animal kingdom out of doors. With the best intentions he found it impossible to concentrate his mind on the putting on of coals, the bringing in of tea, the waiting at table, and answering the bell.

I made his acquaintance when staying with friends in the country. What first attracted my attention was his pleasant face, and the affection he inspired in a handsome collie, who during the evening used to repose gracefully on the hearthrug. When James came in to draw down the blinds, Bruce, who was not of a demonstrative nature, would invariably rise from the rug and, slowly wagging his tail, go forward to greet him. James, while busily drawing the curtains with one hand would furtively caress him with the other, and the little greeting over, James would retire discreetly, and Bruce return to the rug. Later on I was struck by his excessive zeal. He seemed to me to wait at table with his whole soul. He would run to answer the bell as if his life depended on his getting there before it stopped sounding, and he would tear off to execute an order before it was well uttered.

“What a nice boy James is?” I remarked after I had been there a day or two.

James

“A very nice boy,” they answered, “but *so* naughty.”

“Naughty!” I echoed, “why, he looks a perfect saint!”

“Ah, yes,” they said, “he is doing his best now.”

And then they told me James’s story. They had taken him out of the village to train him as a house boy in order to take him out to New Zealand, where they were going to spend the winter. He was desperately eager to go. To him the prospect of New Zealand was thronged with possibilities of adventure and excitement. But the interest he took in the world out of doors, which made him so keen about going, stood in his way. With a farmyard full of animals within five minutes of the house, a rabbit warren almost at the front door, a plantation full of birds, and a garden full of domestic pets, dogs, peacocks, not to mention a cage of ferrets and a mongoose—he found it utterly impossible to fix his mind on his domestic duties. Though his principal duty was to answer the bell, he was hardly ever on the premises. After the bell had pealed for half an hour he would appear, panting, having been birdnesting in the wood, pursuing rabbits on the hill, or ratting in the stable. If he found himself unoccupied for a moment he would bolt off at once, and once out it was a pure matter of chance when he would come

in again. If he could think of nothing more *James* amusing to do he would milk the cows or feed the pigs, quite regardless of the fact that it had already been done. From pure wantonness he had, on one occasion, let all the ferrets out before breakfast, and was obliged to spend the rest of the day in catching them.

“How many rats have you caught, James?” said his master, with undisguised sarcasm, when after ringing the bell for half an hour for the coffee one evening, James had at last appeared panting from the stable-yard.

“Only two, sir,” answered James, sublimely unconscious in the excitement of the moment that anything was amiss with his behaviour.

“But he looks such a good boy!” I said, after hearing the list of his delinquencies. Indeed, as I thought of his irreproachable bearing and his excessive zeal I could hardly believe the account of his iniquities.

“Oh, he’s good enough now,” they said, “because we told him he was so troublesome that we could not take him to New Zealand.”

“What did he say?” I asked.

“He didn’t say anything. But he wept all day. And now he is making frantic efforts to be good in the hopes that we may relent.”

I looked at James with renewed interest. His strenuous endeavours to be good seemed

James

to me pathetic. I found myself hoping as eagerly as he did, that they would relent. When I heard of the obstacles which beset them in their search for a substitute I could not help feeling pleased. When I came upon a family council reconsidering James as a candidate for the post, I rejoiced openly.

I watched him laying the table after the decision had been made known to him that he was to go, accompanied with a lecture on his iniquities. He seemed to me to be walking on air, and positively "busting" with good resolutions.

XXXVIII

ALL human beings, and most things, have *Burst* their bad moments. The bad moment of an indiarubber pneumatic bicycle tyre is when it has burst. There is, perhaps, nothing which exhibits a greater contrast between its worst and its best moments. Nothing is so satisfactory a sight as a well-filled tyre ; nothing so depressing and demoralising a spectacle as the same tyre when burst. It seems even to impart buoyancy, or limpness as the case may be, to its surroundings, so that one wonders if there may not be more in the indiarubber tyre than at first meets the eye. The well-pumped-up tyre imparts life and energy to the very atmosphere through which it spins. The burst tyre, if we may so speak, spreads burstness all around it—takes the wind out of the day itself, so that it lies, like the tyre, prostrate and flabby on the ground without power to rise.

We started in the morning, as full of hope as our tyres were full of wind. We bounded along the road, scarcely feeling the ground. It was one of those light, misty

mornings that gradually dissipate themselves in heat. Whiffs of a cool breeze occasionally brushed our cheeks and gave us a feeling of exhilaration. We had that sense of being well-equipped which is so satisfactory. A train took us through some miles of flat fen country, and landed us at a small railway station within a couple of miles of a river, along whose banks we designed to make our way to a quaint old inn lying in the midst of the Fens, with picturesque marsh and rush country all round. Thence we intended to ride to the cathedral town perched on a hill, and come home by train.

Our way to the river took us through the village, by a broad road that wound between grey stone houses and cottages. Bright little gardens in front of the cottages, women standing gossiping at the doors over their knitting or their babies, and cats dozing in the sun, impressed one with a feeling of the cleanly prosperity of the place as we spun along. When we came upon the river the sun had drunk up all the mist and beaten down the breeze, and was blazing down on the unveiled landscape. The sight of cool water running between low banks fringed with rushes, and patches of flat, shining water-lily leaves, dotted with cool, yellow blossoms, was a refreshing sight. We stood for a moment beside our bicycles, drinking in some of the pleasant, rush-scented air that

played over the surface of the water, and *Burst* following with our eyes the course of the river meandering through flat meadows, from a man who sat, an emblem of repose, fishing on the bank near where we stood, to a distant windmill. Then we mounted and set off on our way along the towing-path.

No afternoon could have been more full of the promise of enjoyment. I was formulating some such thought in my mind, when I was startled by a report like a gun, and saw Max, who was in front, come to a sudden stand and dismount. My first idea was that he had inadvertently gone over a charge of dynamite. He was stooping over his bicycle when I came up with him, examining the tyre. A glance showed me what had happened. It hung limp and flabby round the wheel. Part of it had slipped away, and disclosed a rent about three inches long in the inner tube. It had burst. That was all that had happened. But it was quite enough. As I gazed I felt that it was not only the tyre that had burst. Somewhere in our mental or moral anatomy a corresponding "burst" had taken place. The buoyancy that had made our footsteps light when we started had escaped, and we hung limp and drooping like the tyre. The pleasant day that had been spread out before us had burst too, and lay shrivelled up like a windless air-bladder.

The peaceful fisherman had looked up at

Burst

the report. He now came forward to proffer his sympathy. Together with him we examined the hole, took out our mending tackle, and found it wholly inadequate for such a rent. He appeared to know the neighbourhood, and from him we learned that there was no one in the village who could mend a bicycle, no one who kept a bicycle for hire, no one, in fact, who could render us any assistance. It was a sleepy old place, he said—a hundred years behind the times, though it had once known prosperity. There was nothing for it but to retrace our steps to the railway station, and await a train to take us home.

As we tramped with feet heavier than lead, trundling our bicycles along the hard, dusty road, whose meanderings now seemed so interminable that it was difficult to believe it was the same road along which our well-filled tyres had bounded with such ease, I could not help wondering how it was that the look of bygone, exploded prosperity had escaped me. There was a lifeless look about the grey stone houses, as they leaned heavily against each other, a flat, spiritless air about the one or two stray inhabitants lingering on their doorsteps, a shrivelled, mummy-like appearance about the cats. After what seemed miles of weary tramping with a scorching, as it were, dried-up sun beating on our heads, we reached the little red-brick

station, with its white fence and surrounding *Burst* telegraph and signal poles and wires, lying sunk in a hollow, from which one felt it would be in vain for it to try and move. We were prepared to find that trains passed it but seldom. That any facility to move should have been given us at this point would almost have jarred upon the prostrate vitality that surrounded us. More than three vacant hours stretched before us with no energy to turn them to any account. We sat in a dry ditch by the side of the dusty road and listlessly watched the procession that, with long gaps in its continuity, slowly wound towards us over the top of the stone railway bridge, and passed along the road in front of us—carts, waggons, country folk with bundles, a lumbering traction-engine on its way to reap the poetry out of a harvest-field, and finally a wheezy barrel organ that, doubtless thinking we looked depressed, sat down in front of us and began to play, and gasped and wheezed in a manner so suggestive of want of wind that, flinging it a sixpence, we got up and moved away. We turned out of the dusty road into a dusty lane with a low, irregular stone wall on one side and a hawthorn hedge on the other. At the end of the lane was a stile leading to a cornfield. We leant against the stile and looked at the ripe corn, that seemed to be bursting because no one had energy to come and cut it, and

then got over the stile and sauntered down a narrow footpath to yet another stile set in a thick hedge. Over this we found ourselves on a curious, undulating piece of ground, all odd-shaped hillocks, mounds, banks, and terraces, with a covering of green turf which had the appearance of having been thrown over to conceal what lay beneath. Some of the hillocks were high enough to cast a pleasant shade, and at the side of one, half-way down, we threw ourselves on the grassy slope to rest and contemplate the scene. The covering of green turf obviously covered a ruined castle. Just beneath us ran the moat, dry and turf-covered like the hillocks. The irregular mass of hillocks, knobs and mounds that it encircled had been the main castle ; and where we rested had been the ramparts and towers. So jealously did the turf guard its secret that not even a stone peeped forth to betray it. Only the tell-tale shape told us that the now silent, peaceful spot, had once resounded to the clamour of human life. What had become of the full, busy life, the pomp, the grandeur, the sounds of talking and laughter that had once filled the place in which now hovered a spirit of dreamy repose ? They had vanished, like the air from the burst tyre, leaving the mere shell to lie heavily on the ground, a lifeless mass of stone, inert, unbuoyant, dead, and covered with turf. Has everything burst ?

I wondered, and fell asleep, and slept till it *Burst*
was time to go to the station.

“I now know what it is to feel ‘like a
burst drum,’ ” said Max, who had been read-
ing Stevenson. He appeared to derive a cer-
tain amount of satisfaction from the reflection.

XXXIX

IT was with a feeling of insecurity that I looked out of the railway-carriage window and saw the somewhat rickety-looking wooden bridge that connected the island with the mainland. Indeed, the flat sandy island itself, looked more at the mercy of the elements than was compatible with perfect security. Seen from the mainland, as we approached, it looked a mere film of land—a sandbank emerging from the sea, which a little gentle pressure would submerge, so that the waves might sweep unimpeded over its surface.

It added not a little to the feeling of insecurity that a furious gale was blowing as we traversed the spindly-looking bridge. The wind howled and whistled, rain beat against the window panes, and looking out one saw nothing but sea tossed into small waves, and driving mist. The train slackened its pace and proceeded with a caution that suggested peril. One could feel it struggling in the teeth of the wind, striving to avoid losing its equilibrium and being blown off the bridge to which it clung, into the storm-tossed sea.

It was a relief to find oneself on solid earth again, though it was a mere pancake of sand and stubby grass. Seen enveloped in mist and rain, it looked a wind-shorn, bleak spot, the grass and trees all blown sideways by repeated south-westerly gales. Indeed, a gale was in possession as we set foot in it, and had been having its own way with the island for several days past, rollicking over it in boisterous sport, and curling the sea into waves that broke on the shingly shore with a roar. Only the day before it had lashed itself into a fury, and tearing along the beach had created havoc among the boat-houses, picking one up and dashing it again in fragments on the shingle.

*Septem-
ber Sea*

While it continued in such fury it was prudent to remain indoors, and for a day or two we hardly knew what sort of an island we had landed on. We gazed through the windows at the forlorn prospect of driving rain and lashing sea, listened to the wind whistling down the chimneys, and felt it now and again take the hotel by the shoulders and shake it, as if it would pick it up and dash it down again if it dared.

It wearied itself out at last. The sun, which had been struggling to look through the clouds of mist, feeling it had been driven off prematurely, got a gleam in edgeways, clung persistently to its advantage, till it shone through with full force, overcoming

*Septem-
ber Sea* the gale, so that it sank panting on the shore.

The next day, instead of a wind-shorn forlorn, god-forsaken bit of shingle and sand, a warm little island lay basking in the sun, lapped round by a tired sea, that had only energy to pull itself up every now and then into a lazy ground-swell, that broke with a gentle, prolonged roar, in glistening foam on the beach. A September summer had alighted on the island.

The gale had depressed and chastened us. Folks said the weather had "broken." The aspect on sea and land lent probability to the statement, and we had schooled ourselves to look forward to an autumn month, with dreary mists, persistent rain and chill winds. So when summer looked in smiling once more, we welcomed her with open arms.

It is a place where a September sun might love to linger—a dreamy place, where one may lose oneself in idle musings. There are none of the distractions of civilisation. It is out of the beat of the wandering minstrel, the nigger, and the beach entertainer. One end of the island, a slightly undulating plain of sand-dune, shingle, and turf, dotted with furze and blackberry bushes, has been appropriated by the ubiquitous golfer. And he is to be seen in companies of twos and threes, followed by caddies wandering over the links. For those who do not play golf there is

nothing to do but to wander along the shore, *September Sea* sit on the shingle, and throw stones at the waves, and watch the ever varying beauty of sea and sky. It is a peaceful scene on a sunny September afternoon, as unlike as anything can be to the busy scintillation of human beings to be seen at a fashionable watering place, where bathing machines, umbrellas, parasols, beach hawkers, sunbonnets, bare legs, buckets, and spades make a many-coloured medley that meets one's eyes on the shore, so that one almost forgets the chief feature of the place—the sea. On the island beach are no such distractions. One's eyes dwell undisturbed on sea and sky. At low tide a shining strip of wet, grey sand, between the shingle and the sea, curves away on either side till it loses itself in the distance. Higher up, where the shelving shingle meets the turf, lie idle boats, and a disabled fishing smack or two, on their sides, with masts pointing disconsolately at the horizon. Dotted at intervals along the turf margin are white bathing tents. The sea, smooth as glass, breaks in gentle ripples on the sand. Here and there on its shining surface fishing smacks and a yacht or two are anchored, their masts and sails reflected in quivering lines on the water. Nearer land, boats, with gently dipping oars, looking black against the white evening sea, move in a leisurely way, laying lobster pots and fishing nets. Some way along the beach, on the wet

sand, a group of fishermen are drawing a net, slowly and deliberately. In fact, a lazy deliberation, in sympathy with the placid sea and sky, seems characteristic of the spot.

Further on, beyond this group, to the west, where the sun, a red disk, is sending pink and red streaks across the sky, and dyeing the glassy sea with red, the towers and buildings of a busier haunt of men can be seen, dark and misty of outline against the evening sky, in contrast to the sharp definition of yachts and fishing smacks on the sea. And, indeed, one has only to wander over the golf-links to the other end of the island, a distance of a mile and a half, and cross the narrow channel of sea that divides the island from the mainland, in the little steam ferry-boat that plies backwards and forwards all day, to find oneself in the hurly-burly of a fashionable watering-place, where people throng in hundreds and thousands instead of twos and threes, and where life, instead of dreaming along to the sound of a lazy surf, is rushing at express-train speed to the sound of brass bands and barrel-organs. There the soft, undulating line of shore has been hammered straight, and plastered down with asphalte, bordered with iron railings, and dotted with erections wherein people may shelter from storm and rain ; treatment of practical utility, but, from an æsthetic point of view, barbarous. "Why not let the shore alone?" one feels inclined to

ask. Surely it does very well as it is. A *September Sea* glance at the ceaseless stream of human beings that throng the esplanade, the crowds around the pavilions, and the steamboat, black with humanity, making its way towards the pier to discharge more crowds, contrasted with the handful of people scattered along the peaceful shores of the little flat island, where the coast is as nature made it, convince one that the majority prefers to have its seaside resort thus dealt with—prefers to take its holiday hedged round by signs of civilisation at express train speed.

Further on still, one finds the sea thick with traffic of ships. Life has doffed the frivolity of the esplanade, and donned a serious business-like air. Yachts, full sail like white birds on the wing, fleck the distance, while near at hand masts jostle each other against the sky. There are ships of every description, from the great battleship that lies with magnificent ease upon the water, to the fussy little tug, a sort of insect among ships, that hissing and puffing, bustles backwards and forwards between wharves and ships, taking people in and emptying them out again with a ceaseless energy that wearies one. On the wharves everything is movement and work. Steamers crowd alongside, moving in and out to the splash of paddle and screw. Trains rush in snorting, empty hundreds of people on to the platform, take up other hundreds, and hurry

off out of sight. Cranes are for ever drawing up, swinging, and letting down great burdens. One feels bewildered at the busy bustle, the ceaseless come and go, the amazing energy that keeps it all going. It is a relief to get away from it all, back to the lazy little island near at hand, where the business of life is to sit on the beach and throw stones at the sea, to pull a boat lazily along the shore, or discuss the price of a lobster with the native fisherman.

XL

HE was obviously very cross. Indeed, it *So Cross!* was her crossness that attracted me to her. For I have great sympathy with cross people. Not only do I feel grateful to them for expressing what I myself must needs endure in silence, for want of spirit or courage to do otherwise ; for acting as a sort of vent to the moral atmosphere and relieving it of its ill-humour ; but I find something refreshing, even exhilarating, in the exhibition of their petulance. The abrupt incisiveness of the cross seems to act on my amiable, compliant, and somewhat torpid nature as a sort of moral tonic. Moreover—and this I can only account for by the law of the attraction of opposites—I frequently find myself drawn to the cross by sentiments of affection. By the cross I do not mean those who are ill-humoured all through, but those whose ill-humour lies chiefly on the surface, and is continually evaporating in the ebullitions of what I might call an over-active moral skin. These little ebullitions, acting as a gentle and regular vent, keep the moral system pure, so that I frequently find the irritable and churlish

So Cross! manner of the cross cloaks an otherwise delightful and lovable nature.

Consequently, when the amiable, chattering, characterless stream of cosmopolitans that kept pouring in to the coffee-room through the glass doors, was relieved in its monotony by an extremely cross-looking old lady, I, who had been nearly asleep over my tea and eggs, lulled by the murmur of voices and the clatter of tea-cups, suddenly woke up and felt that my interest in things in general had received a jog.

The scowl she threw at me as she entered was delightful. How charming to be so cross, so early in the morning, I thought, and how invigorating to feel instant animosity to the first person you set eyes on. For that I should be the first to receive her scowl was apparently due to the fact that I was the first person on whom her eyes fell as she entered the room.

Like many amiable people I am an eager observer of human nature and a passionate absorber of the manners and customs of those whom I meet in my walks abroad. As, like the Mystic, I scrawl my daily pattern over the surface of the earth in train, on bicycle, or on foot, my mind is busy drinking in impressions—not of the roads, the buildings, or the skies, but of the other human beings, whose pattern intersects or for a minute or two runs side by side with mine. Hotels and

boarding-houses, landing-stages, where heterogeneous crowds stop to take breath, inasmuch as they afford scope for a more ample and leisurely observation than the passing glimpses I obtain *en route*, are my delight. And I always exercise great care in the selection of my point of view.

I was a new arrival, and being alone I had taken a little table laid for two in a corner, whence I could command the swing doors, and also have a comprehensive view of the whole coffee-room. Owing to the monotonous amiability of the breakfasters, there was, as I said, nothing to rouse me from the misty somnolence that is apt to cling to one in the early morning (especially if one happens to be alone), until the entrance of my cross friend made a rift in the dulness, and roused me to eager observation.

What part of the room, I asked myself, would she enliven with her presence? Before I had time to express a surmise to myself she was bearing down upon me. With sulky determination she made straight for my corner, and sat herself down at the vacant seat at my table—under my very nose. I could have asked for nothing better. The rest of the coffee-room at once retreated to a mere background for her striking and interesting personality. I stole furtive glances at her, and in a very few minutes had mentally photographed her, analysed her, summed her

So Cross! up, classified her, and labelled her. She belonged to that class of British spinster that frequents hotels and boarding-houses, but is seldom seen elsewhere. She was a buxom lady verging on sixty, with a long-shaped, rather fat face, and a mouth whose corners drooped slightly, but whether from perennial crossness or the aggravation of the moment I was unable to decide. I could not see her eyes for she kept them cast down. She wore a rather ornate cap of lace and ribbons, and her pincushion-like figure was decorated with a moss-agate brooch and a gold chain with a variety of appendages. Her fingers were adorned with old-fashioned pearl and turquoise rings.

But the most striking thing about her was her crossness. I have seldom seen any one so cross. Indeed, it seemed to me that it rose almost to the sublime height of sorrow, for I could see that she could barely restrain her tears. As is often the case, the inanimate accompaniments of the breakfast-table seemed to observe that she was in a highly wrought state, and combine to irritate her. The chair on which she was about to seat herself caught one of its legs in a hole in the carpet and obstinately refused to move, till a savage wrench forced it to yield, and obliged her to sit down rather abruptly. Her table-napkin was done up so tightly into some fantastic form that it would not come undone. She

shook it first petulantly, then vindictively, *So Cross!* then savagely, and smoothed it out viciously on her knee. Her cup had been put at the wrong side ; she moved it to the other side with a little incisive bang. Between each of these operations she glanced crossly at me, as if she thought I was somehow to blame. Then she took up the little teapot. It was a vicious-looking little teapot, and I believe it did it on purpose to annoy. It kept its lid tight shut, and a feeble little stream of very pale tea trickled from its spout. Suddenly the lid opened with a little "puff" and let out a flood of tea over the sides. If the teapot had had a neck I veritably believe she would have wrung it. She made a violent effort to control herself and called the waiter. She spoke in a low, choking voice.

"Take this"—(here came a pause, which I filled mentally with an assortment of fancy words) "teapot away, and bring me another." The waiter swept away with it, like a mechanical toy just wound up. The teapot episode had stirred my sympathies, and I longed to tell her so. "Say it to me ! oh, say it all to me ! I know so well what it feels like." But she didn't. She broke a bit of roll off fiercely, harpooned a pat of butter, and landed it on her plate, and then she went for her ham and eggs. Apparently the egg was not all that could be wished, and I could not but comment on the maliciousness of the

So Cross! Fate that had given to me, who am of so amiable a disposition that nothing puts me out, an irreproachable egg, and to one whose temper had already been so sorely tried, an egg that any one might have seen would lash her to a fury. She called the waiter again.

“Take away this *disgusting* egg!” she said. And then in a savage undertone, “Why did you not keep my place?” And she flung an awful glance across the table to where I sat.

Gradually it dawned upon my slow perception what was the matter with her. I had taken her place! From having been, as I supposed, merely an observer in the drama, some one looking on from an obscure corner of the pit, I suddenly found myself raised to the position of chief actor. Unwittingly I had been playing the most important part in the play—that of the leading villain. For a moment my sudden rise to importance embarrassed me. I had to adapt myself from the position of spectator to that of performer, and I felt at a loss how to comport myself. There was a pause. The waiter had glanced at me and murmured something apologetic. The old lady, with flushed cheeks and downcast eyes, looked like a child on the verge of breaking down. For a moment I continued to eat toast and marmalade, and then began to put aside my table-napkin with an assumption of leisurely unconcern, and then I felt I

must say something—something to comfort *So Gross!* and appease.

“I am afraid,” I heard myself saying at last, “that I have caused you annoyance by taking your seat.” It was a feeble remark, I felt, but the necessity to say something at once, gave me no time to make it up.

“I don’t blame you,” she said in a wounded, choking voice ; “but the waiters, they should have known ; I have been here so long !” Her lip trembled. I feared she was about to dissolve in tears. I got up, bowed stiffly, inanely ; murmured something about “sorry to have caused her so much inconvenience,” made the most feeble, undignified progress towards the door, and left that cross old thing with tears actually coursing down her cheeks !

XLI

My Tea-kettle

THERE is inborn in most of us a tendency to invest inanimate objects with a personality and character of their own, and love or hate them accordingly. In childhood, this habit played an important part in our lives. Our imagination wove magic garments for things that disguised them, or transformed them into whatever we wished them to be. Trees were giants or soldiers according to the exigencies of the moment. Sticks were gleaming swords, umbrellas dashing chargers. But now that we are grown up, such habits would be liable to land us in a lunatic asylum, and we try to conceal any traces of them that education has failed to eradicate. Such traces, however, are to be found in most of us. We single out inanimate objects of our everyday existence, and endow them in imagination with human personalities and characters, and love and cherish them as the friends of our bosom.

Some confine their affections to objects of a particular class. They have, let us say, a passion for china, and cannot pass a china shop without gazing into it and longing to

possess its contents. Probably they will *My Tea-*
single out some particular form of china *kettle*
object on which to lavish affection. I knew
a lady who positively adored jugs. She
could not resist buying jugs whenever she
took her walks abroad. Her house was like
a jug shop. There were jugs of every
description in it—enormous jugs that reached
half-way up the wall, and microscopic jugs
that you could hardly see. If you gave her
an opening she would dilate on the charms of
jugs by the hour, and talk what seemed to
me—to whom jugs were jugs and nothing
more—the most preposterous nonsense. I
have heard her say she liked a certain jug
because it had “such an amiable disposition ;”
and I verily believe she was deeply in love
with a certain blue-and-white jug that she
always carried about with her.

I myself have known what it is to have
what I may call an emotional *tendresse* for an
umbrella, and to pass a sleepless night because
I had left him by mistake at the house of a
friend. I would not for worlds have it told
in Gath, but the thought that oppressed me
most was, that whereas he had been accus-
tomed to sleep in my room, which was a
well-warmed apartment, he must now pass
the night in an umbrella stand in a cold hall,
where, with the thermometer below zero, he
ran a risk of being frozen to death. I have
seen a great strong man, well over six feet in

*My Tea-
kettle*

height, and broad in proportion, turn pale with emotion, and look as if about to faint, at the loss of a beloved walking-stick—a clumsy thing, covered with knobs. He could hardly have shown signs of more genuine distress if his lady-love had been carried off by brigands before his very eyes.

As for myself, the class of goods that have most power to stir my emotions are the metal objects that are to be found in an ironmonger's shop—things made of iron, tin, copper, and brass, such as carpenters' tools, fire-irons, pots and pans and utensils used in kitchens, and especially kettles. There is, to my mind, something particularly human and attractive about a kettle, especially when it is singing. The number of kettles I have bought for pure love, and without any ulterior motive of making them serve a useful purpose, would fill a house. At one time I never passed an ironmonger's shop without buying at least one. There was always some very good reason for indulging the impulse—such as that the last one I had bought was too big or too small, its spout was a bad shape, or the lid did not fit. Anything did as an excuse for indulging my whim, and allowing me to enjoy, as I walked home, that delightful feeling of possession one has after acquiring something one really likes.

It is three years now since I bought a kettle for anything but purposes of the

strictest use. For I had a narrow escape of *My Tea*-
becoming a monomaniac on the subject, and *kettle*
deemed it prudent to suppress my kettle-buy-
ing propensities. I was recovering from a
serious illness when, in the early days of my
convalescence, a friend brought me a present
of a kettle. "I know you like kettles," she
said, "and when I saw this this morning in a
shop window, I could not resist going in and
buying it for you ;" and she produced from a
piece of brown paper the most bewitching
kettle I had ever seen. It was small and
round and shapely, and very delicately
enamelled in white, with a fine blue line.
But there was something about its expression
that inspired love at first sight, and I
promptly fell in love with it. I held out
trembling hands for it, like a child who sees
within reach a coveted toy ; and for the next
hour it sat beside me on the bed, dozing
cosily in a little nest of the bedclothes, while
I handled and fondled it, took the lid off, and
put it on again, and every now and then
picked it up to look at it from a different
point of view. I had it filled with water and
put on the fire to boil for tea, and lay watch-
ing it from my bed as it reposed on the
embers, thinking how charming it looked.
When the silence of the room was broken by
its beginning to sing in a cooing, purring sort
of voice, I was so moved that tears started to
my eyes, and when it began jubilantly to

*My Tea-
kettle*

bubble, I laughed from sympathy. Tea was made with it, and it seemed to me that no tea had ever tasted like it before. It had a subtle flavour that was perfectly unique.

From the day it entered my room I positively adored that kettle. Whether it cast a spell over me, or whether it arose from a disordered state of my imagination, I do not know. But nobody I have ever come across, either in or out of a sick-room, could shed such a feeling of warm cosiness and comfort as that diminutive kettle when it sat cooing on the hob. I lay and watched it all day long. I counted the hours till I could ask nurse to fill it with water and set it to boil. I listened with suspended breath for its first little purr. If it was allowed to boil over without being lifted off at once I felt nearly frantic. I was in a fever of impatience, as soon as the tea was made, till it had been sent off to the kitchen to be cleaned, fearing that the black might sink in, if it was left too long ; in an agony of suspense till it came back again, and perfectly miserable if it stayed away five minutes longer than usual. I used to comfort myself with the thought that I should clean it myself when I was well enough—twice, three times, all day long if necessary, so that it need never leave my side. I grew more wrapped up in it every day.

Then one day, about a fortnight after its arrival, I suddenly realised that I was going

kettle-mad. It was the day I got up for the *My Tea-* first time, and I was to go out the following *kettle* afternoon. As I sat in an arm chair by the fire, gazing as usual at the kettle, I found myself wondering if it would enjoy a drive if I took it with me the next day. Then something said to me quite suddenly, "You are going mad about that kettle." It gave me a start. I pulled myself together, and began to consider whether it were true or not. I faced the situation, and subjected my feelings, sentiments, and behaviour generally to the severest scrutiny, and came to the conclusion that it was perfectly true. I *was* going mad.

Inconsistent as it may appear with the foregoing narrative, I am a woman of much common sense. As soon as I had come to the conclusion that I was drifting towards monomania I determined to deal firmly with myself. I said to myself that the kettle and I must part. It required a struggle of a good half hour to carry this resolve into execution, and tear myself away from a thing I idolised as I had come to idolise that kettle. But my common sense triumphed at last. I turned to nurse and said, "Nurse, do you know any one to whom we could give this little kettle? You see, I shall not want it any more now." Nurse looked at me in surprise. "But I thought you liked it so much!" she said. "So I do," I said, "and I should like to give it to some one who

My Tea-kettle would be kind to it, and keep it clean." Here I broke down, and laughed helplessly for a few minutes. "I would rather give it to you than to any one else, nurse," I went on, "because, you see, you know what—what—what a dear little kettle it is," I ended rather feebly.

So nurse took it away, and I never saw it again, and recovered from my monomania. When I see her, as I do from time to time, I never fail to ask how the kettle is, and generally receive the same reply "It's doing nicely, thank you, and kept *so clean!*" But the other day she added another piece of information. "There's something different about that kettle to other kettles *I* think. You can't help getting fond of it. I'm getting quite silly about it myself, and as for my sister—why, she can't bear it out of her sight!"

XLII

AS a rule a child gets more enjoyment *Maria* out of toys that allow most play to the imagination. An imaginative boy will often derive more satisfaction from a collection of pebbles which he pretends is an army of soldiers, than from a box of fully-accoutréed warriors on horseback, correctly dressed in the uniform of a regiment ; and an imaginative girl will play with more satisfaction with a piece of stick wrapped in a handkerchief, than with an elaborately-made mechanical doll that shuts its eyes and makes a sort of bleat for "papa" or "mamma" when you pull a string. The pebbles do not resemble soldiers, nor does the stick resemble a baby ; but the resemblance is in each case easily supplied by the imagination, and with far greater truth to nature than by the most skilful modelling and painting of the toy-maker.

In fact, children have often the same feeling about a toy that leaves nothing to the imagination that many of us have about the illustrations in a novel. They spoil the story, by

Maria putting before us in a definite form what might have been supplied in a far more pleasing manner by our fancy. In a toy meant to represent a person or an animal it may almost be said that the more nearly they imitate nature the less amusement will the child get out of them. I have known a child who would play all day with a rag doll whose features were entirely obliterated, and who had only one arm and no legs, and who would tire in five minutes of a more skilfully-fashioned imitation of life. No kind of doll delighted another small maiden of my acquaintance more, than a pillow dressed in a baby's frock, with a scarf tied round it to make a neck, and a sash to make a waist.

Looking back at the crowd of Marys, Gertrudes, Roses, and Gwendolines that played so important a part in my life in early days, one doll stands out with a personality so vivid as to drive all others into a shadowy background, and she was of nursery manufacture—made entirely of rag, and with a face whose features were clumsily indicated by blots of ink. Her name, as much as anything else, marked her as a being apart. There was nothing fanciful about it—nothing suggestive of a waxen beauty with golden locks. She rejoiced in the common, matter-of-fact name of Maria.

Even at this distance of time it seems absurd to call Maria a doll. She was more of

a person to me than any one I have ever *Maria* come across. For two years of my life I lived on terms of the most intimate companionship with her. I was rarely separated from her for more than an hour at a time. I knew all her secrets, and she knew all mine. She shared all my joys and sorrows, and sympathised with all my thoughts and fancies. The fairy-tales Maria and I told each other early in the morning, before it was time to get up, when she used to get into my bed, would fill volumes. When she ceased to exist I refused to be comforted, though dolls innumerable were showered upon me, and I had to be sent away to the seaside to forget her.

Maria was, as I said, made entirely of rag. She was made by a hospital nurse, who had nursed me through a serious illness and wished to enliven the period of my convalescence. I watched her creation from my bed with deep and absorbing interest. A square piece of calico was spread out. The middle was filled with little bits of chopped-up rag and then tied up into a lump about the size of a walnut. That made the head. More stuffing of rags, and another tie at the waist, made the body. The rest of the calico was then trimmed round to form petticoats. A strip of calico folded up, and sewn to keep it together, was attached to each side of the body for arms, and with a pen and some marking-ink she

Maria was provided with eyes, nose, mouth, and some hair.

We find it difficult to explain why we like some people and cannot stand others: we only know it is a fact. I should have found it impossible to say wherein lay Maria's charm, or what endeared her so much to me. I only knew that from the first moment of her existence I loved her. A natural sympathy seemed to exist between us from the first. I felt she understood me, and that her companionship satisfied a long-felt want. I began at once to make her an outfit, and such a labour of love was it, that no doll I ever possessed had so many clothes as Maria. She had hats and dresses innumerable, including a black silk dress, which she always wore on Sunday. She slept in a cot of her own, on a chair at my bedside. Not once in the course of her existence did I neglect to undress her and put her to bed at night, and to get her up and dress her in the morning. She had her meals with the same regularity that I had my own, and a certain portion of each day was devoted to her education. During my games and my walks abroad she was always with me, and I spent hours of every day in simply conversing with her and telling her stories.

My allegiance to Maria only once wavered, and that was under circumstances of an exceptional nature. There arrived for me one Christmas morning, from one of my aunts, a

long-shaped brown-paper parcel of particularly interesting appearance. I experienced a thrill of joy when, on opening the box, I found lying in silver paper, her eyes closed in peaceful slumber, the most beautiful doll I had ever beheld, such a doll as I had often dreamed of, but never before possessed, a beautiful being with golden hair and blue eyes, and clothed from tip to toe in gorgeous array. Her underclothes were of the daintiest muslin, she wore a pelisse and hat trimmed with fur, and her feet were clad in pink silk socks and morocco leather shoes. I took her out of her box trembling with excitement, and the whole of that day I walked about with her in my arms, admiring her, and rejoicing in the feeling of possession. When I had exhausted all my admiration, I began to feel that I must go a step further and begin to make friends with her. I decided that her name was Gwendoline, and seating her on my lap I proceeded to talk to her, as I was accustomed to talk to Maria. Whether it was that in the expression of her blue eyes I detected a cold, unsympathetic nature, or that her irreproachable attire created a feeling of stiffness between us, I do not know ; but somehow I could not get on with her. There was a strange want of response about her. She sat on my lap gazing straight in front of her with a slightly supercilious smile, and took not the smallest notice of anything

Maria

I said, till a feeling of blankness came over me. I had thought before that if I had such a doll to play with, my cup would be full—I should have nothing more to wish for. And now that I possessed her, held her in my arms and knew she was my very own, there was a strange flatness about it. I had attained my wish, but it fell short of my expectations. I felt vaguely disappointed, and even slightly bored. There was no satisfaction to be got out of her. She was ready-made perfection, and had everything a doll could desire, and there was an end of her.

Nevertheless, I struggled hard for a whole afternoon to get into sympathy with her. I put her to bed and made her get up again. I dressed and undressed her about six times. I took her for walks round the nursery and wheeled her about in a perambulator. I held her up to look out of the window. I sat her in a chair at the table and gave her all sorts of sumptuous repasts. But it was no use. She remained a waxen figure, utterly without soul or individuality. I began almost to hate her. Finally I got a small amount of satisfaction out of pretending she had been naughty, and beating her and putting her in the corner, where she sat imperturbably gazing at nothing out of her stupid blue eyes.

It was with quite a feeling of relief that I turned to look for my beloved Maria. She had been thrown aside for the first time in

her life, and now lay huddled up in a corner, *Maria* her legs and arms sprawling, and her head drooping on her shoulder, the picture of dejection. I picked her up with a rush of remorse, hugged her with fierce affection, and poured a volley of tender epithets into her ears. That I should have imagined for a moment I could ever love any one as much as my darling *Maria*!

As for the waxen image, I refused to have anything more to do with her. She was put away in a drawer and finally sent to a children's hospital, where I hope she found someone to appreciate her cold and thoroughly nasty nature.

XLIII

Knitting “**W**HY don’t you take to knitting?”

said my cousin Lavinia yesterday.

I had complained to her that my eyesight was no longer as good as it used to be, and that I found the piece of needlework on which I was engaged, trying. Lavinia is an expert and industrious knitter, and at the moment she spoke, her knitting needles were busily clicking over a long heather-brown worsted stocking, while a colossal ball to match was meandering about on the carpet.

My cousin is nothing if not feminine, and all her occupations are in strict accordance with the old-fashioned ideal of womanhood. She is a capable housekeeper, and has an intimate knowledge of the details of the art. She busies herself with poultry-keeping and gardening and letter-writing, does not neglect her social duties, and fills up her odd moments with knitting. I believe she can knit anything from a baby’s sock to a gentleman’s waistcoat ; but her favourite piece of work, and the one I am most familiar with,

is the long, heather-brown stocking that was *Knitting* dangling from her needles as she spoke.

I watched her idly for some minutes after she had made her suggestion, and noted the fact that though I had not seen her much occupied with it during the day, the stocking had increased considerably in length since I had seen it the day before. And then my mind went back thirty years to the interminable garter on which I first learned to knit, and which was, for years it seems now, though possibly it was only months, the bane of my existence. There was a certain amount of excitement about beginning it. "I will teach you how to knit," my nurse had said, "and then you can knit a garter." Though I had the very vaguest notion as to what a knitted garter could be like, there were delightful possibilities in those days about making anything, and interest in it remained as long as completion seemed a certainty—which, alas! was not long. Gradually, from being a certainty in the near present, it became a dim probability in the remote future, then a faint possibility, till at last it faded away into the realm of impossible dreams. By way of sowing the seeds of perseverance and industry, my nurse, who was in many respects a sensible woman, insisted that I should spend half an hour every day seated on a low stool in the nursery knitting at my garter. Half an hour nowadays seems

Knitting a mere whiff of time. Then it was an eternity. For the first few days I was buoyed up with fallacious hopes. "Do you think it will be finished by the day after to-morrow?" I asked, when I had reached the fourth row. And the answer, though it was ambiguous, led me to believe that such a consummation was at least within my power if I worked hard. I remember a vague feeling of disappointment when the day after to-morrow found the garter very little longer than on the day of my hopes. I began to have doubts as to whether it increased at all. "Does it look longer than when I began it this morning?" I would ask wistfully. "Longer than it did yesterday?" and would wonder if they were trying to deceive me when they assured me that it did.

How that garter *crawled*. The whole universe seemed to slacken to a laborious creeping measure, to move heavily by imperceptible steps, as I added stitch upon stitch, line upon line, and could neither see nor feel a difference. Looking back, it seems to me that I must have knitted that garter into my very soul, so vividly does it stand out even at this distance of time in every stage of its development; from its earliest stage when it looked like a small white flag on a staff, till it became a long, meaningless, dirty white string that had to be rolled up into a ball.

It was made of thick, white cotton of *Knitting* the thickness of Berlin wool. It consisted of eight stitches to begin with (but the number varied considerably as it went on), and was approximately an inch wide. It was an un-beautiful object from the very beginning, and it grew worse as it progressed. It was full of irregularities and blemishes, and though white to begin with, soon assumed a dirty, dingy hue. Sometimes I knitted it too loose, and sometimes too tight ; so that in one line the stitches gaped, and in another they, so to speak, set their teeth viciously, so that I could hardly get the knitting-needle between them. This gave the garter a hopelessly irregular shape. At one time it was over an inch in width, at another it barely measured three-quarters. Here and there were blemishes, reminding me of agonising moments when I had dropped a stitch, and, hot and nervous, had fished for it in vain, each dive after it with the needle seeming to send it further and further away. Some of these lost stitches had gone for ever, leaving a hopeless scar. Others had been fished up by one of my elders by what seemed to me supernatural cleverness. Here and there were horrid knots that would not come undone, and had to be knitted up, and at one place there were five or six dusky lines, making a dark grey band, that I had knitted with dirty, hot hands. From the first, as I said, I never clearly understood why

Knitting it was called a garter, nor how it was to be applied to the human leg. But after it had passed the flag stage, I formed the notion that it was to be a broad string of knitting, and in all probability was intended to span the leg. I took to measuring it, and on the day on which I found it would just go round my leg above the knee I became quite light-hearted, for I thought it must be almost finished. I held the two ends together so as to make a ring, and showing it to my nurse, I said, "I believe it is long enough." "Oh, no," said nurse, cheerfully, "that's not nearly long enough. It must go round several times and then tuck in. It'll have to be a lot longer than that to be any use. Why, you'll have to use up that whole ball of cotton before it's long enough."

If I had disliked it before, I now loathed it. The mere sight of it was enough to overwhelm me with weariness, and to take all the colour and interest out of life, and make it ponderous and squalid. The daily half-hour spent in slowly and drearily adding stitch to stitch became a sort of purgatory from which I saw no release. For even if in the remote future it ever arrived at being long enough, I knew that *one* garter would be of no manner of use to any one with two legs, and that, unless anything unforeseen should occur, I should have to start another. In fact, life for me seemed to be resolving

itself into an interminable, spun-out, ill-shapen *Knitting* cotton garter.

Mercifully, the garter slipped as quietly out of my life as it had slipped in. I was promoted to the schoolroom, and the unfinished garter, which pertained to the nursery, was left behind in the nursery cupboard, and as a substitute I found myself engaged in making needle-books and book-markers of perforated cardboard, and kettle-holders of Berlin wool.

What the effect might have been if such a change had not come about I do not know. But I am persuaded that that garter had a demoralising effect on my character, from which it has never recovered. I still suffer from a disposition to weary of an occupation, especially if it is of the nature of a piece of work, long before the end is in view, for which I cannot but make that garter responsible. It gave me a deeply-rooted conviction of the futility of human endeavour, and the impossibility of ever finishing anything, which naturally results in a tendency not to attempt it. The moral tonic and healthful impulse given to the character by the completing of anything, however small and insignificant, is great. The demoralising effect of not finishing is even greater. Every scrap of work we fail to finish lessens our belief in our own power, and when we lose belief in ourselves little remains to help us through life.

Parcels

A neatly-done-up parcel is an object of interest to most of us. To a child it is an entrancing object, full of possibilities of wild delight. To give a child a gift naked and unwrapped up, is to rob it of a prelude of mystery that will add tenfold to its effect. The very brownness and newness of the paper are full of delightful toy-shop suggestions, too precious to be wasted.

And, for my part, there is no setting for the gift, whether wrapped up or not, like the dusk of early morning, when the shadows of dreamland, not yet driven off by the light of day, cast a shroud of fascinating mystery over everything. There is nothing in after-life to compare with the thrill we felt when, after groping about in the dark for the stocking we had left hanging limp and empty at the foot of the bed the night before, we came upon it tight and bulging with mysterious lumps. We remember now the excited whispers from cot to cot —like birds beginning to chirp at early dawn —that gradually, as the light spread into the dark corners of the room, swelled to a joyful clatter of tongues—“There’s a round thing in the toe of mine!” “There’s a ‘normous queer-shaped thing in the middle of mine!” “Look! Look!! Look!!!”

That the humble, earth-bound stocking should on this one night of the year be raised to a pinnacle of glory, and pose with a halo round its head, gives one food for reflection on life’s compensations.

The parcels, too large to go in the stocking, *Parcels* that we found on the chair at our bedside, or under our pillow, shared the halo. It was delightful to put out a hand at a venture in the vague darkness and come in contact with something hard and strange that had certainly not been there when we got into bed. Its reality was quite startling in the midst of the dim dreamland from which we were emerging. To think that it had been there quite close and we had not known it!

Next to the dark setting of early dawn, I would choose the gay glitter of the Christmas-tree for the children's gifts. To neglect these two precious opportunities and choose the unromantic and uncompromisingly real light of the breakfast-table, or the hopeless materiality of midday, is blind perversity.

An imaginative child, however, will manufacture a halo for his gift, even out of the toast, roll, and coffee atmosphere of breakfast. To see Tommy unpack what he calls a "parsool" is to realise this.

Plain, everyday life is such an intoxicating medley and succession of delights to Tommy, such a scintillation of light and colour, that to add a bright red box, as large as himself, full of dashing soldiers in gay uniforms, seemed like straining the colour-laden bubble till it must surely burst. No day, however humdrum to us, passes, that Tommy does not pause and hug himself with ecstasy at the thought of all the rapture it contains. To

Parcels

watch him with cheeks aflame and eyes ablaze with excitement, rushing about in a wild game of "pirates"; or revelling, silent and absorbed, in a coloured picture-book; or listening, with the rapt, far-away expression of a cherub, to a fairy-tale, makes us wonder whether we middle-aged folk are not looking at the world through a piece of dirty-coloured glass that has taken all the colour out of it.

Tommy's "parsool" arrived a week before Christmas Day, and was deposited in a cupboard to await the happy morn. But Tommy got wind of it, and to keep him in suspense and the whole nursery with him for a week was not to be thought of. By a sort of prerogative that none of the other children question, Tommy comes down to the dining-room breakfast, after the nursery bread-and-milk, and is regaled with small scraps of toast faintly flavoured with jam. This was considered a favourable opportunity for handing over the "parsool." "Daddy's gone to find my parsool," said Tommy, and hugged himself ecstatically.

It was a large, flat parcel, larger than Tommy had anticipated, and he greeted it with a long-drawn, rapturous "O—o—o—oh!" as it was deposited on the ground before him. Quivering with excitement, and his eyes sparkling with anticipation, he watched the undoing of the string which would not yield to his impatient fingers. The brown paper was pulled off, and there lay revealed to

sight a bright, shiny, red box. With another *Parcels* rapturous "O—o—o—oh!" Tommy, kneeling on the ground, felt the shining surface with his hand, and gazed at it as if he was absorbing its redness.

As I watched him I felt that he was laying up a memory of its shining redness that would remain vivid long after its surroundings had faded away. When he had gazed for a few seconds he drew off the sliding lid. A sheet of tissue-paper came to view, bulging with concealed objects. Tommy felt these. "I believe its soldiers!" he said with a ripple of glee, and carefully (as if he would linger over his sensations) drew off the paper and disclosed rows of soldiers. Foot soldiers, horse soldiers, bugler, standard bearer, band and cannon, all bright with paint and as heavy as lead, which latter, to judge from the way Tommy handled them as he took them out of the box, was not the least satisfactory of their qualities—hardly less so, perhaps, than the delicious smell of painted lead that emanated from them.

A pile of "parsools" awaits Tommy on Christmas morning. Already he is thinking about his stocking. He realises that one of the disadvantages of being only four years old is that you have such a very small stocking.

"When I'm a grown-up man," he says, "I shall have a 'normous big stocking."

"But grown-up men don't hang up their stockings," suggests some one.

At which Tommy becomes thoughtful.

XLV

A Christ- mas Reverie

FATE has willed that I shall spend Christmas in London, instead of in the country. As I look out of the window I wonder if the street knows that it is Christmas Eve—it looks so dull, so cold, so dirty. The houses look gloomy. Already they seem to be putting on the dull grey Bank Holiday cloak they are to wear for the next few days. One or two tradesmen's vans are loitering at various doors down the street, and as I look, a milk-cart rattles past, shooting a boy with a can down the area steps next door in passing—a sight that may be seen from any window on any day of the year. I turn away from the window with a sigh, draw my chair close to the fire, and gazing at the red-hot embers and the dancing flames, fall into a reverie.

I seem to see them all; the long line of Chrismastides that in each year have made a sort of climax towards which all the months have led up.

Seen through the mist of ages those furthest away, like things seen through a fog, are magnified. They loom like great suns,

lurid in colour, though blurred and indistinct, and all around them is a glamour of romance —a halo, as it were, that sheds its rays into the surrounding darkness. As they get nearer the glamour seems to fade away, the colour to die out of them, till those nearest have the cold greyness and sharp definition of an uninteresting photograph.

As I wander back into the past, and lose myself in a maze of memories, two of these far-away Christmastides are illuminated with a ray of light, and shine out of the mist of years with an especial vividness. They are close together, following one upon the other. The one is scarlet and crimson and bright with sparkling sunshine ; the other wears a mantle of snow, and glistens with frost.

It is Christmas Eve in the Antipodes, a day of suspended breath and eager anticipation, when, with every sense poised on tiptoe, one waited for the day, with its intoxicating medley of delights that was to follow.

It seems to me that the atmosphere was charged with life and beauty which it could not contain, but which, glowing through, surrounded me, in a medium of sunshine, sparkling sea, and gorgeous colouring in which I revelled, drawing it in at every pore till the very texture of my being was lost in it.

We were in a boat, paddling in and out of the little shelly creeks, and bays that gave an irregular, zigzagging line to the coast, in quest

of the gorgeous Christmas flowering tree of New Zealand *Pohutukawa*—Christmas-tree, as we called it. It was midsummer. The sun blazed in a transparent sky and glittered on the surface of the sea like jewels. The sea that broke in little ripples on the beach was not blue, but crystal clear, and as transparent as the air, so that even when some distance from the beach one could look through its depths and count the white shells at the bottom. From the cliffs hung great masses of the Christmas-tree, in some places dipping down into the water. Paddling in close, we broke great branches off, piled them up in the boat, and laden with spoils to glorify the house for the next day, wended our way home.

It is more than twenty-five years ago, yet the boatload of dark, rhododendron-like leaves with the bush-like tufts of crimson—more crimson, it seems to me, than anything ever was or will be again—is painted on my mind in colours as fresh and vivid as if it were yesterday. But more penetrating even than the colour or form is an indescribable feeling of Christmas that hangs about the tree, made up of all the delights of Christmas merged in one. As I shut my eyes a whiff of this Christmas air is breathed towards me—and is gone again, before I have had time to draw it well into my lungs. For the soul of things that was so real in childhood is now more fleeting and hard to catch and hold than a

perfume that is wafted on the air. The *A* scene, however, is there always, painted in *Christ-* indelible colours, and to be conjured up at *mas* will. I can feel the hot sunshine beating on *Reverie* my head, can see the white, shelly beach gleaming through the cool, clear water, and floating in a transparent sparkle of sea and air I can refresh my eyes with the dark contrast of the land with the Christmas-tree, laden with its crimson splashes, leaning down from the cliff into the water.

The day that followed was a confused pageant in silver and gold, in the midst of mid-summer sunshine and flowers, among which the scarlet geraniums shone conspicuously. To have taken Santa Claus from his setting of snow and ice and planted him in the midst of tropical luxuriance would have been an incongruity ; so a "good fairy" was substituted, as more in keeping with the scene—an Ariel-like being, who flew round in the middle of the night when every one was deep in slumber, putting gifts under one's pillow, or piling them up on the chair at one's bedside. How often we have strained our eyes to keep awake that we might catch sight of the mysterious visitor —only to wake with a thrill to find it was morning—that Christmas had come, that the "good fairy" had left her delightful parcels, and that once more we had slept through her visit, and failed to catch a glimpse of her !

Curiously enough, there lurked here and

there in the bright impressionism of the picture a streak of misgiving that there was something wrong with this gay-coloured Christmas, with its sunshine and flowers. Our books, with their pictures of Christmas, clad in snow and frost, were a continual protest to it.

Far away, over the sea—at home, as we were accustomed to hear it called—was a snow-white Christmas, glittering with frost and hung around with icicles, where instead of a “good fairy” an invisible Santa Claus filled one’s stockings with gifts, where old Father Christmas came covered with frost and laden with parcels, where robin redbreasts hopped outside the windows in the snow, picking up crumbs, and where boys and girls played at snowballs, made snowmen, and skated on slippery ice till their cheeks glowed. We knew all about it, for our books were full of it, and the Christmas cards too, with their robin redbreasts and frosted landscapes.

Chance willed that the contrast between the two successive Christmastes should be of the sharpest. The last one spent in the Antipodes had been vivid in its colour and warmth ; the first one spent in the home over the sea was intense in its cold and its whiteness. The country was more closely wrapt in snow and ice than it had been for years. Spent in an old-fashioned house in a village that nestled among fields, nothing was wanting that the books and Christmas cards had led

us to expect. Snow fell in silent flakes, and *A* covered the trees, the grass, the thatched roofs *Christ-* and the church. The slate-coloured sky turned *mas* red with the setting sun and the frost-covered *Reverie* branches made delicate lines against it—just like the Christmas cards. The “waits” woke us in the middle of the night with a thrill of weird, excited melancholy, and conjured up a picture that seemed half dream, half reality of the shepherds under the deep, cold sky, and the Star of Bethlehem shining like a jewel. Santa Claus filled the stockings. The post-man, covered with frost and laden with letters and parcels, was a jolly Father Christmas. The robin showed his red breast against the snow, begging for crumbs. All day we rioted in the snow, with glowing cheeks and rushing blood, and the evening was hilarious with Christmas-tree and revelry.

What little Epicureans we were in those days ! How well we knew how to extract the poetry, beauty, and romance out of the present without bothering our heads about either the past or the future !

A stampede of little feet along the pavement outside rouses me from my reverie. I draw up the blind and look out. A troop of children, excited and laden with parcels, rush up the steps of the opposite house, and in their eagerness nearly pull the bell out of its socket. The door opens and lets out a flood of light. I catch sight of branches of holly

*A
Christ-
mas
Reverie*

and mistletoe. The children swoop in and the door shuts.

What has happened to the houses that looked so dull? Their faces are beaming with suppressed mirth and jollity.

Fling on more logs! they seem to say. Fill us with holly and mistletoe, decorate the Christmas-trees, and light them up with thousands of candles. Shower presents. Leave out nothing that will add to the season's picturesque effect. You may think it dull. But there are thousands of youngsters to whom, even in London, it is still a time of fairy-like enchantment and wild delight.

[Some of these papers have already appeared in the Pall Mall Gazette, others in the Ladies' Field. My thanks are due to the Editors of both journals for permission to reprint them.]

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“Miss Reed’s book is an exquisite prose poem—words strung on thought-threads of gold—in which a musician tells his love for one whom he has found to be his ideal. The idea is not new, but the opinion is ventured that nowhere has it been one-half so well carried out as in the ‘Love Letters of a Musician.’ The ecstasy of hope, the apathy of despair, alternate in these enchanting letters, without one line of cynicism to mar the beauty of their effect.”—*Rochester Herald*.

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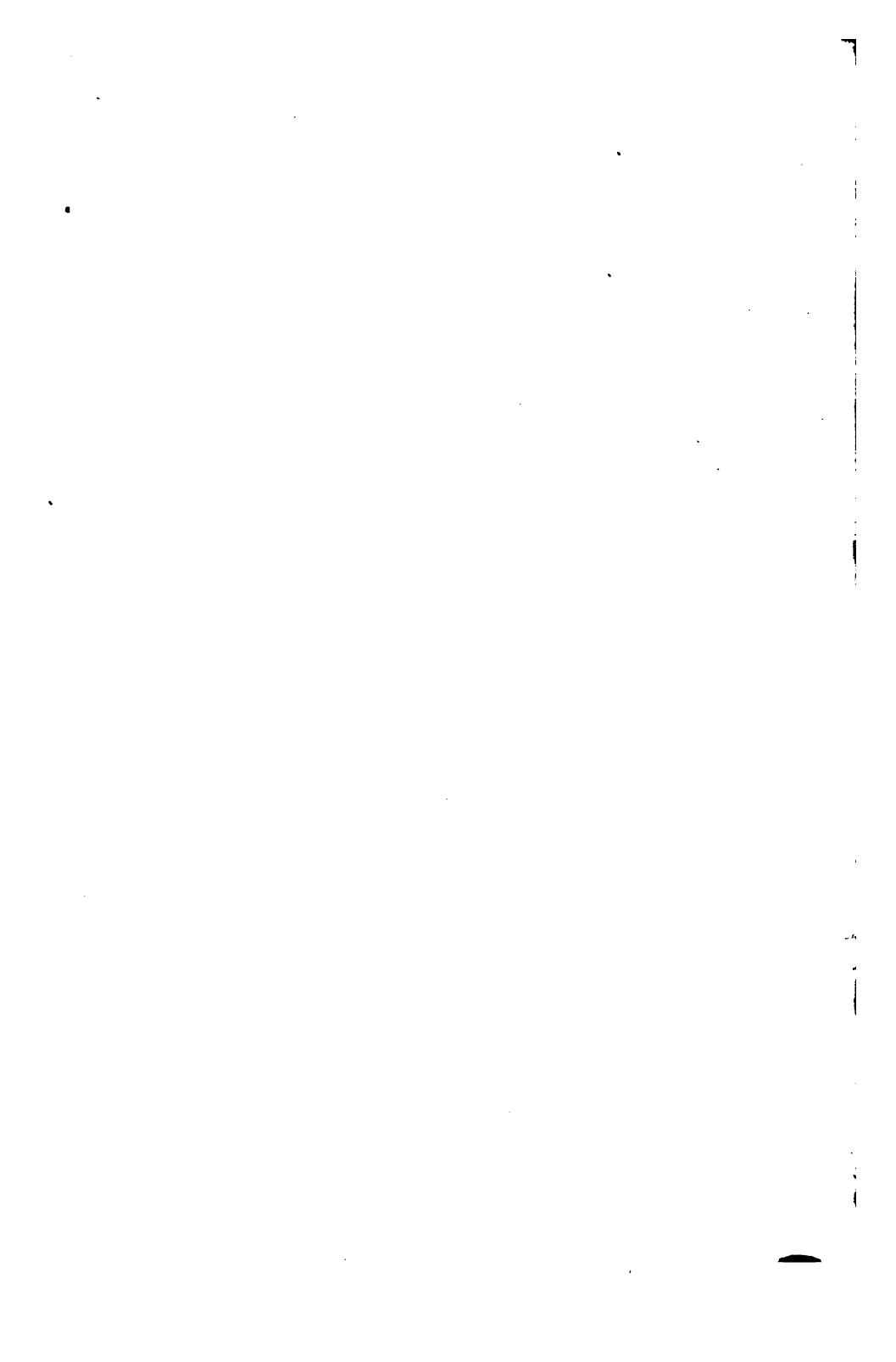
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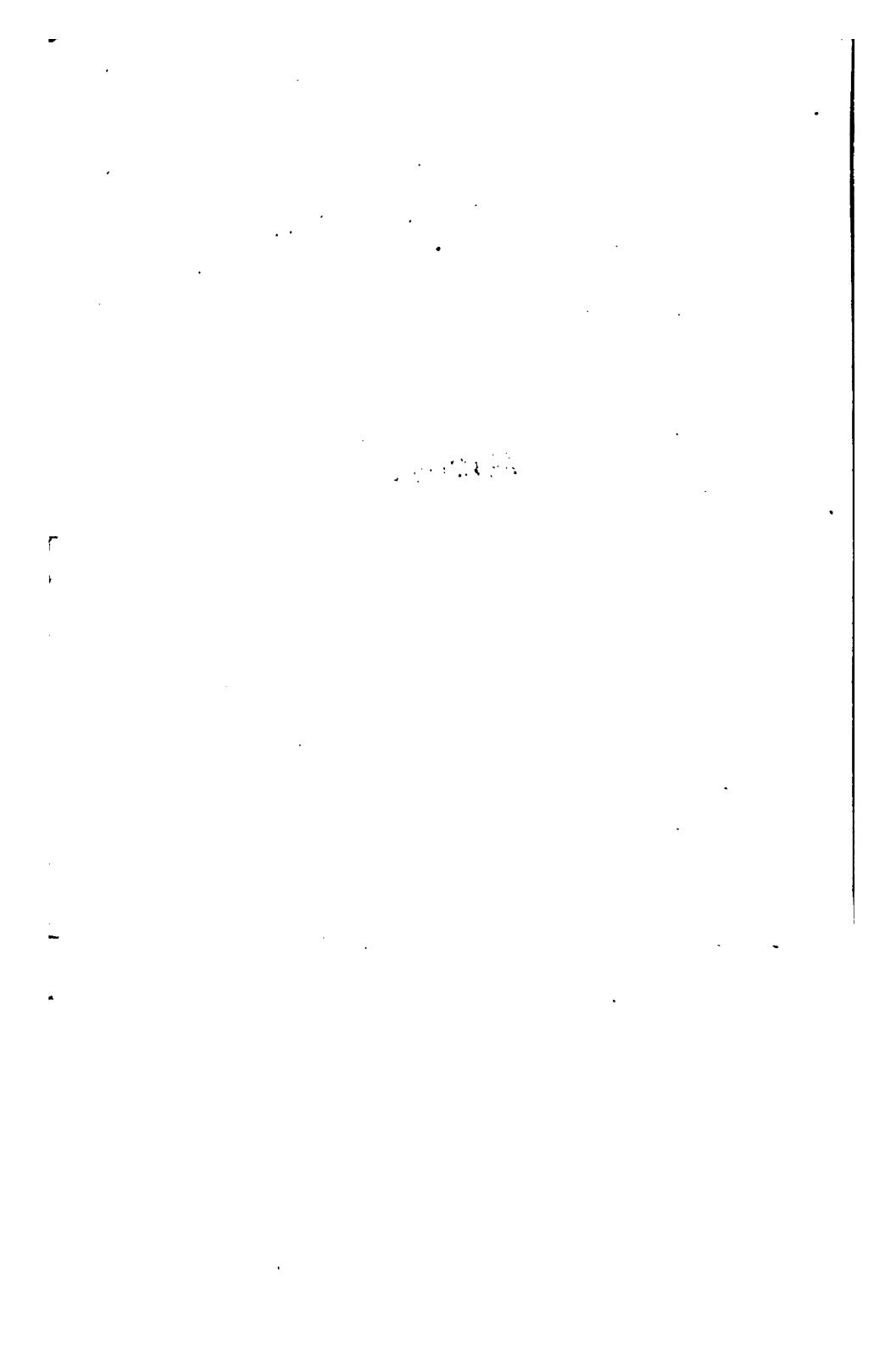
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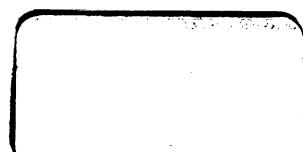


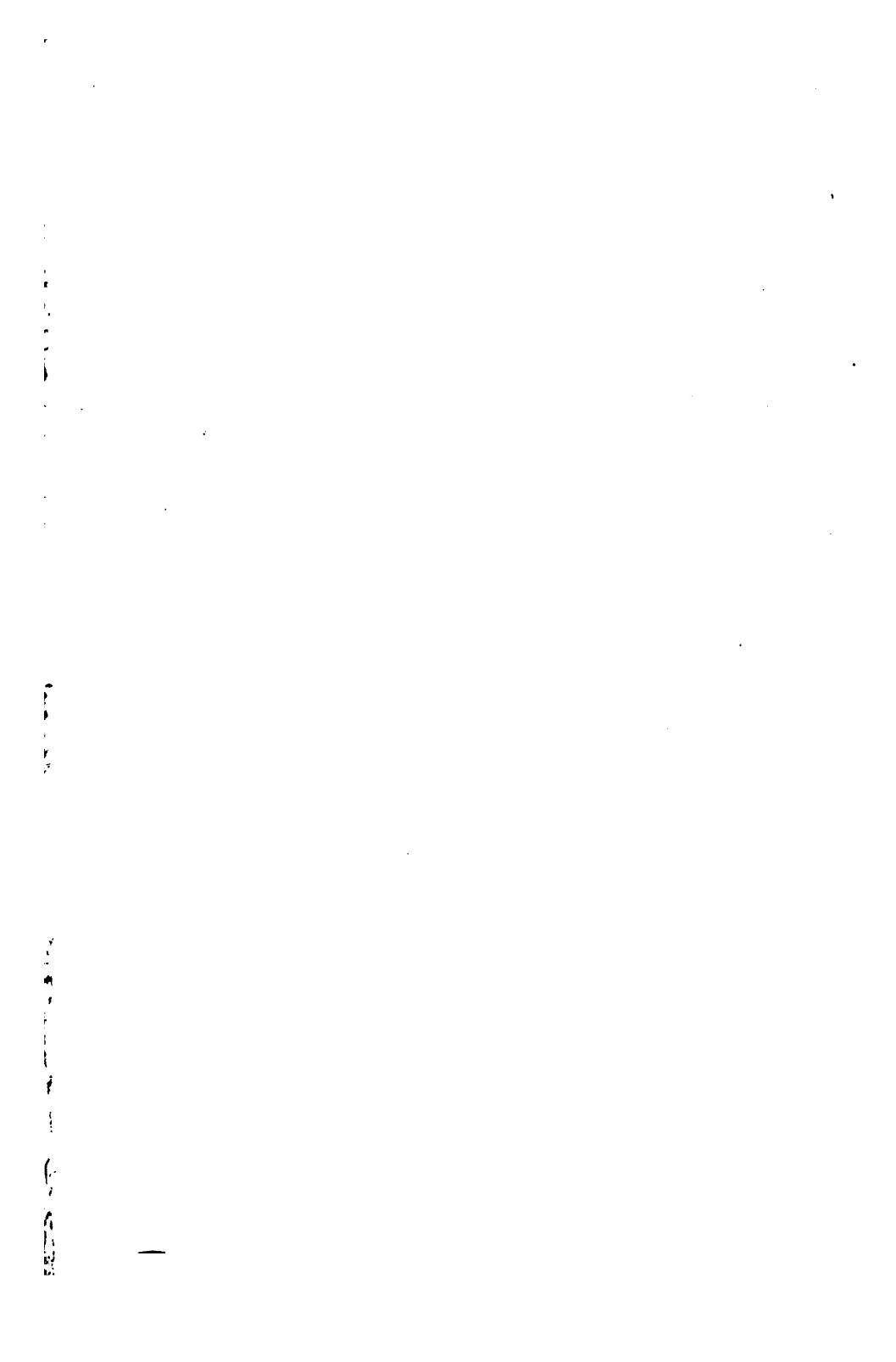


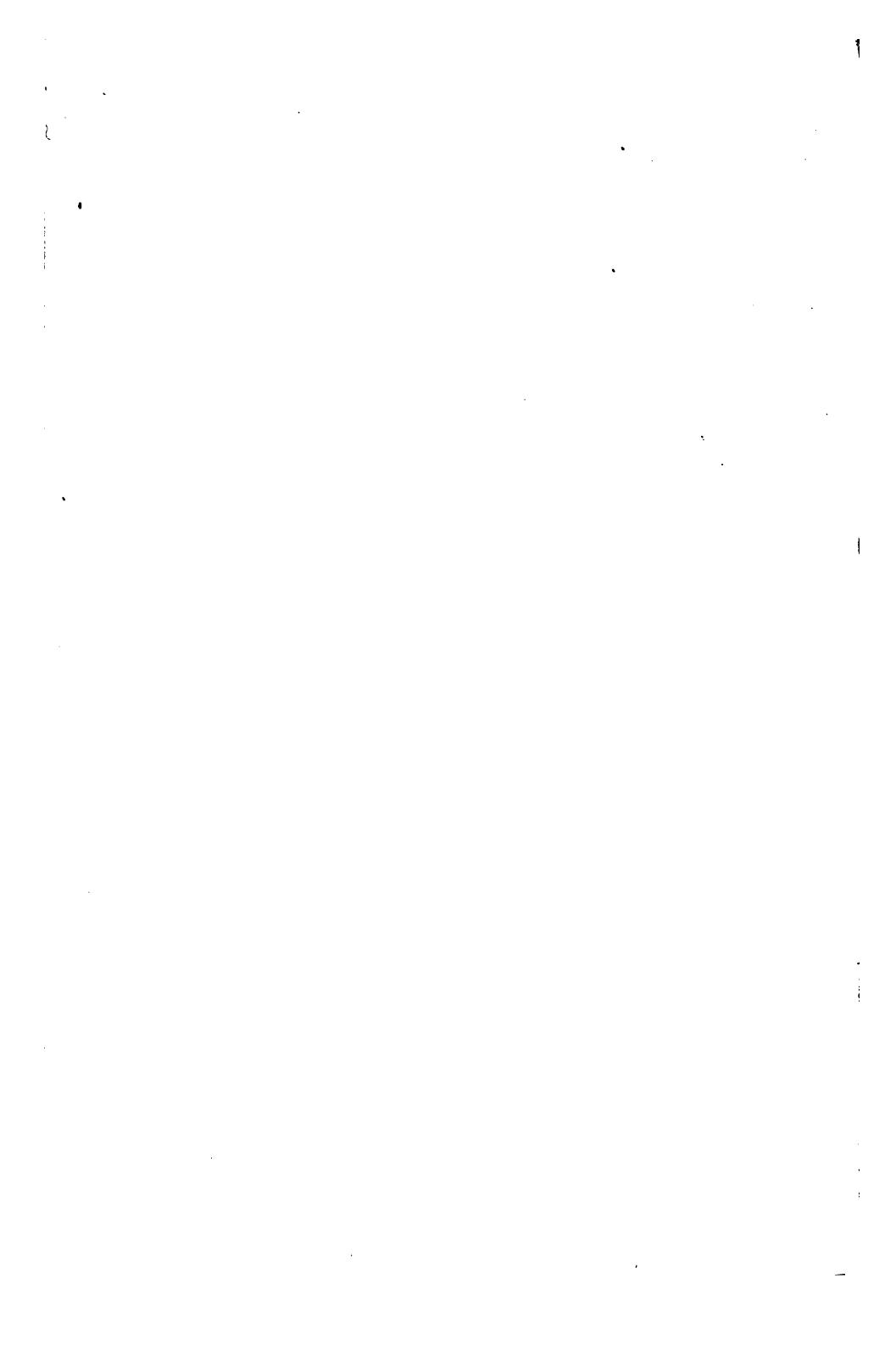


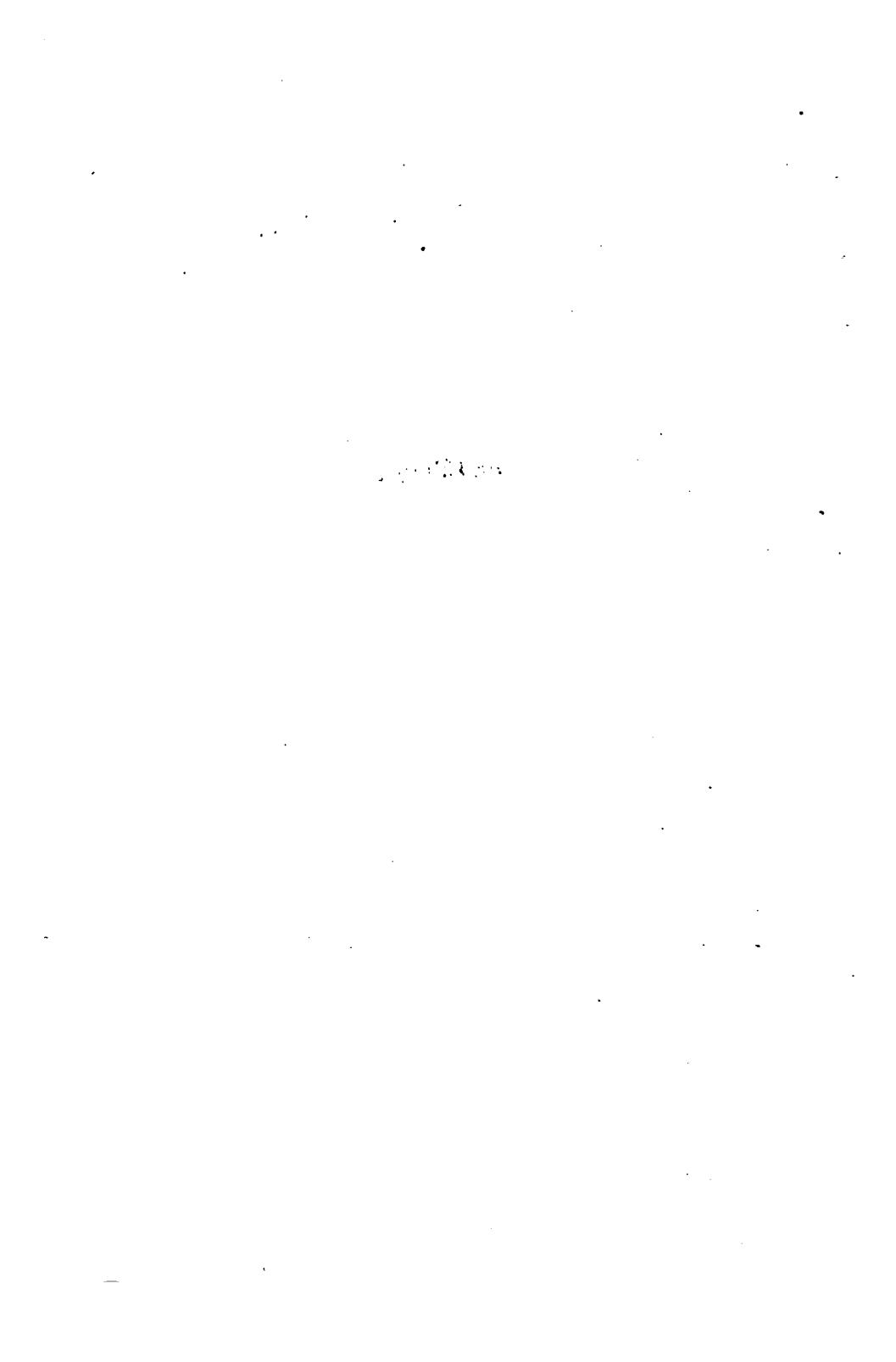


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